# That Which Hath Wings

Richard Dehan

For Henry

Christmas 1918

From Father

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/thatwhichhathwin0000rich

"His arm was round her, her cheek was pressed to his, her bosom heaved against him."

# THAT WHICH HATH WINGS

## A NOVEL OF THE DAY

BY

RICHARD DEHAN

AUTHOR OF "ONE BRAVER THING" ("THE DOP DOCTOR"), "BETWEEN TWO THIEVES," "THE MAN OF IRON," ETC.

"*For a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.*"—ECCLESIAS. X., 20.

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
The Knickerbocker Press
1918

Copyright, 1918
by
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

The Knickerbocker Press, New York

*THESE LEAVES IN*
*DEAR REMEMBRANCE*
*FOR YOUR GRAVE*
*ACROSS THE SEA.*

SIDMOUTH, DEVON,
*January*, 1918.

# CONTENTS


| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I. | PRESENTS TWO YOUNG PEOPLE | 1 |
| II. | DAME NATURE INTERVENES | 6 |
| III. | FAIR ROSAMOND'S CHOICE | 14 |
| IV. | RAYMOND OF THE S. AË. F. | 19 |
| V. | THE BIRD OF WAR | 24 |
| VI. | SHERBRAND | 28 |
| VII. | THE CONSOLATRIX | 34 |
| VIII. | MONSEIGNEUR | 42 |
| IX. | SIR THOMAS ENTERTAINS | 46 |
| X. | A SUPERMAN | 56 |
| XI. | PATRINE SAXHAM | 66 |
| XII. | THE GATHERING OF THE STORM | 72 |
| XIII. | THE SUPERMAN | 75 |
| XIV. | A PARIS DANCE-GARDEN | 83 |
| XV. | THE BITE IN THE KISS | 94 |
| XVI. | THE WIND OF JOY | 103 |
| XVII. | INTRODUCES AN OLD FRIEND | 114 |
| XVIII. | SAXHAM PAYS | 124 |
| XIX. | BAWNE | 128 |
| XX. | THE MODERN HIPPOCRATES | 135 |
| XXI. | MARGOT LOOKS IN | 139 |

CHAPTER PAGE

XXII.—MARGOT IS SQUARE . . . . 150

XXIII.—A MODERN CLUB . . . . . 156

XXIV.—DISILLUSION . . . . . 174

XXV.—THREE MEN IN A CAR . . . . 185

XXVI.—A PAIR OF PALS . . . . . 189

XXVII.—SIR ROLAND TELLS A STORY . . . 197

XXVIII.—THE GOD FROM THE MACHINE . . 205

XXIX.—A SECRET MISSION . . . . 216

XXX.—THE REAPING . . . . . 232

XXXI.—VON HERRNUNG BAITS THE HOOK . . 241

XXXII.—ADVENTURE IN THE AIR . . . . 248

XXXIII.—BAWNE LEARNS THE TRUTH . . . 256

XXXIV.—THE BROWN SATCHEL . . . . 259

XXXV.—NUMBER EIGHTEEN . . . . 266

XXXVI.—HUE AND CRY . . . . . 273

XXXVII.—PATRINE CONFESSES . . . . 285

XXXVIII.—THE REBOUND . . . . . 290

XXXIX.—A NIGHT IN JULY . . . . . 296

XL.—MACROMBIE IS SACKED . . . . 305

XLI.—SAXHAM LIES . . . . . 311

XLII.—SAXHAM BREAKS THE NEWS . . . 316

XLIII.—THE PLUNDERED NEST . . . . 326

XLIV.—PATRINE REMEMBERS . . . . 330

XLV.—FLOTSAM FROM THE NORTH SEA . . 339

XLVI.—AT NORDEICH WIRELESS . . . 354

XLVII.—THE MAN OF "THE DAY" . . . 363

CHAPTER PAGE

XLVIII.—PATRINE IS ENGAGED . . . . 367

XLIX.—THE WAR CLOUD BREAKS . . . 375

L.—THE EVE OF ARMAGEDDON . . . 383

LI.—THE INWARD VOICE . . . . 403

LII.—KHAKI . . . . . 417

LIII.—FRANKY GOES TO THE FRONT . . 420

LIV.—OFFICIAL RETICENCE . . . . 423

LV.—NEWS OF BAWNE . . . . . 431

LVI.—LA BRABANÇONNE . . . . . 447

LVII.—THE BELGIAN WIFE . . . . 456

LVIII.—SHERBRAND BUYS THE LICENCE . . 460

LIX.—THE WOE-WAVE BREAKS . . . . 467

LX.—KULTUR! . . . . . 477

LXI.—LYNETTE DREAMS . . . . . 490

LXII.—WOUNDED FROM THE FRONT . . . 502

LXIII.—BAWNE FINDS A FRIEND . . . 512

LXIV.—AT SEASHEERE . . . . . 531

LXV.—GOOD-BYE, DEAR LOVE, GOOD-BYE! . . 538

LXVI.—MORE KULTUR . . . . . 547

LXVII.—THE QUESTION . . . . . 559

LXVIII.—THE DEVIL-EGG . . . . . 565

LXIX.—A MENACE; AND GOOD NEWS . . . 574

LXX.—A LOVER'S JOURNEY . . . . 586

LXXI.—LIVING AND DEAD . . . . 594

LXXII.—LOVE THAT HAS WINGS . . . . 606

# That Which Hath Wings

## CHAPTER I

### PRESENTS TWO YOUNG PEOPLE

In January, 1914, Francis Athelstan Sherbrand, Viscount Norwater, only son of that fine old warrior, General the Right Honourable Roger Sherbrand, V.C., K.C.B., first Earl of Mitchelborough, married Margot Mountjohn, otherwise known as "Kittums," and found that she was wonderfully innocent—for a girl who knew so much.

It was a genuine love-match, Franky being a comparatively poor Guardsman, with only two thousand a year in addition to his pay as a Second Lieutenant in the Royal Bearskins Plain, and Margot a mere Cinderella in comparison with heiresses of the American canned-provision and cereal kind.

It had seemed to Franky, standing with patent-leathered feet at the Rubicon dividing bachelorhood from Benedictism, that all his wooing had been done at Margot's Club. True, he had actually proposed to Margot at the Royal Naval and Military Tournament of the previous June, and Margot, hysterical with sheer ecstasy, as the horses gravely played at push-ball, had pinched his arm and gasped out:

"*Yes*, but don't take my mind off the game just now; these dear beasts are so *heavenly!* . . ."

And theatres, film-picture-shows and variety halls, race-meetings, receptions, balls and kettledrums, polo and croquet-clubs, had fostered the courtship of Franky and Margot; but all their love-making had been carried out to the

accompanying hum of conversation and the tinkle of crystal and silver-plate in the dining-room of the "Ladies' Social," where Margot had her favourite table in the glass-screened corner by the fire-place; or in the circular smoking-room with the Persian divan and green-glass dome, that Margot had given the Club on her nineteenth birthday; or in the boudoir belonging to the suite she had decorated for herself on the condition that no other member got the rooms if Margot wanted them, which Margot nearly always did. . . .

There was a big, rambling, ancient red-brick Hall, stone-faced in the Early Jacobean manner, standing with its rare old gardens and glass-houses, lawns and shrubberies, about it, within sight and sound of the Channel, amidst pine and beech-woods carpeted with bilberry-bushes, heathery moors, and coverts neck-high in July with the *Osmunda regalis* fern. The Hall belonged to Margot, though you never found her there except for a week or two in September and three days at Christmas-tide. The first fortnight with the birds was well enough, but those three days at Christmas marked the limit. Of human endurance Margot meant, possibly. She never vouchsafed to explain.

She also possessed a house in town, but just as her deceased father's spinster sister lived at the Hall in Devonshire, so did her dead mother's brother Derek, with his collection of European moths and butterflies and other *Lepidoptera*, inhabit the fine old mansion in Hanover Square. Devonshire at Christmas marked the limit of dulness, but Hanover Square all the London season through beat the band for sheer ghastly boredom. . . . Not that there were any flies on little old London. . . . Paris and Ostend were ripping places, and you could put in a clinking good time at Monte Carlo. . . . Margot had tried New York and liked it, except for the place itself, which made you think of illustrations to weird Dunsany legends in which towering temples climb up unendingly upon each other into black star-speckled skies. But the Club and London, with Un-

limited Bridge and Tango, constituted Margot's idea of earthly happiness. She never had dreamed of marrying anybody—until Franky had arrived on the scene.

Perhaps you can see Franky, with the wholesome tan of the Autumn Manœuvres yet upon him. Twenty-seven, well-made and muscular, if with somewhat sloping shoulders and legs of the type that look better in Bedford cords and puttees, or leathers and hunting-tops, than in tweed knickers and woollen stockings, or Court knee-breeches and silks. Observe his well-shaped feet and slight strong hands with pointed fingers, like those of his ancestors, painted by Vandyke; his brown eyes—distinctly good if not glowing with the fire of intellect, his forehead too steep and narrow; his moustache of the regulation tooth-brush kind, adorning the upper-lip that will not shut down firmly over his white, rather prominent, front teeth. Cap the small rounded skull of him with bright brown hair, brushed and anointed to astonishing sleekness, dress him in the full uniform of a Second Lieutenant in the Bearskins Plain, and you have Franky on his wedding-day.

Photographs of the happy couple published in the *Daily Wire*, the *Weekly Silhouette*, the *Lady's Dictatorial*, and the *Photographic Smile*, hardly do the bridegroom justice. In that without the busby his features are fixed in a painful grin, while in the other there are no features at all. But Margot—Margot in a hobble-skirt of satin and chiffon, with a tulle turban-veil, starred with orange-flowers in pearls and diamonds, and a long serpent-tail train of silver brocade, hung from her shoulders by ropes of pearls, was "almost too swee," to quote Margot's Club friends. Search had been made, amongst the said friends, many of whom were married, for a pair of five-year-old pages to carry the bride's train; but there being, for some reason, a dearth of babies among Margot's wedded intimates, the idea had to be given up.

The wedding was quite the prettiest function of the season. The eight bridesmaids walked in moss-green *crêpe de Chine*

veiled with silver-spotted chiffon. On their heads were skull-caps of silver tissue, each having a thirty-inch-high aigrette supported by a thin *bandeau* of gold, set with crystals and olivines, the gift of the bride. . . . Their stockings were of white lace openwork, the left knee of each being clasped by the bridegroom's souvenir, a garter of gold, crystal, and olivines. Silver slippers with four-inch heels completed the ravishing effect.

*O Perfect Love!* was sung before the Bishop's Address, and the ceremony concluded with *The Voice that Breathed* and Stainer's *Sevenfold Amen*. The bridal-party passed down the nave to the strains of the Wedding Chorus from *Lohengrin*. And there was a reception at the Berkeley Square house of one of the dearest of Margot's innumerable dearest friends, and the happy pair left in their beautiful brand-new Winston-Beeston touring car *en route* for the old red-brick Hall in Devonshire. Decidedly the honeymoon might have been termed ideal—and four subsequent months of married life proved tolerably cloudless—until Fate sent a stinging hailstorm to strip the roses from the bridal bower.

An unexpected, appalling, inevitable discovery was made in Paris in the *Grande Semaine*, at the end of the loveliest of June seasons. It utterly ruined—for two people—the Day of the Grand Prix, that marks the climax of the Big Week, when the Parisian coaching-world tools its four-in-hands to Longchamps Racecourse, and the smartest, richest, and gayest people, mustered from every capital of Europe, parade under the chestnut-trees that shade the sunny paddock, to display or criticise the creations of the greatest *couturiers*.

Margot had put on an astonishing gown for the occasion. . . . You will recall that the summer dress designs of 1914 *were* astonishing; the autumn modes promised to be even more so, according to Babin, Touchet, and the Brothers Paillôt. Skirts—already as short and as narrow as

possible—were to be even narrower; the Alpha and Omega of perfection would be represented by the Amphora Silhouette. And Margot, revolving before her cheval-glass in a sheath of jonquil-coloured silk *lisse*, embroidered with blue-and-green beetle-wings, found—to her horror and consternation——

Shall one phrase it that Dame Nature, intent upon her essential, unfashionable business of reproduction, was at variance with Madame Fashion *re* the Amphora Silhouette? The slender shape was not yet spoilt, but long before the autumn came, no art would mask the wealthy curves of its maternity.

## CHAPTER II

### DAME NATURE INTERVENES

"I CAN'T bear it!—I won't bear it!" Margot reiterated. With her tumbled hair, swollen eyes, pink uptilted nose, and the little mouth and chin that quivered with each sobbing breath intaken, she looked absurdly babyish for her twenty years, as she vowed that wild horses shouldn't drag her to Longchamps, and railed against the injustice of Fate.

"None of my married friends have had such rotten luck!" she asserted. She stamped upon the velvety carpet and flashed at Franky a glance of imperious appeal. "Not Tota Stannus, or Cynthia Charterhouse, or Joan Delabrand, or anybody! Then, why me? That's what I want to know? After all the mascots I've worn and carried about with me. . . . Gojo and Jollikins and the jade tree-frog, and the rest! . . . Every single one given me by a different woman who'd been married for years and never had a baby! This very day I'll smash the whole lot!"

"By the Great Brass Hat! . . ."

Franky exploded before he could stop himself, and laughed until the tears coursed down. So "Gojo," the black velvet kitten, and "Jollikins," the fat, leering, naked thing that sat and squinted over its pot-belly at its own huge, shapeless feet, and all the array of gadgets and netsukis crowding Margot's toilette-table and *secrétaire*, down to "Pat-Pat," the bog-oak pig, and "Ti-Ti," the jade tree-frog, were so many insurances against the Menace of Maternity. By Jove! women were regular children. . . . And Margot . . . Nothing but a baby, this poor little Margot—going, in spite of Jollikins and Gojo, to have a baby of her own.

"What is one to believe? Whom is one to trust in? . . ."

"'Trust in.' . . . My best child, you don't mean that you believed those women when they told you that such twopenny gadgets could work charms of—that or any other kind?"

"Indeed, indeed they do! Tota Stannus was *perfectly serious* when she came to my boudoir one night at the Club, about a week before our—the wedding. . . . She said—I can hear her now; '*Well, old child, you're to be married on Wednesday, and of course you know the ropes well enough not to want any tips from me. . . . Still——*'"

"That wasn't overwhelmingly flattering," Franky commented, "from a married woman twice your age. What else did she say?"

"She said I must be aware," went on Margot, "that a woman who wanted to keep her friends and her figure, simply couldn't afford to have kids."

"And you——"

Franky no longer battled with the grin that would have infuriated Margot. Something had wiped it from his face.

"I said she was frightfully kind, but that I was quite well-posted—everything was O.K., and she needn't alarm herself. . . . And she said, 'Oh! if you've arranged things with Franky, jolly sensible of him! Too often a man who is open and liberal-minded before marriage develops *gerontocracie* afterwards, don't you know? . . .' And I told her that you were the very reverse of narrow-minded—and she kissed me and wished me happiness, and went away. And the maid knocked later on to say Mrs. Stannus sent her apologies for having forgotten to leave her little gift. And the little gift was, Jollikins. And my special pals joined in to stand me a farewell dinner, and they drowned my enamel Club badge in a bowl of Maraschino punch, and fished it up and gave me this diamond and enamel one, mounted as a tie-brooch, instead. And every married

woman brought me a mascot. . . . I had Gojo from Joan Delabrand, and Ti-Ti from Cynthia Charterhouse, and the jade tree-frog from Patrine Saxham, and the carved African bean from Rhona Helvellyn, and——"

Franky objected:

"Neither Patrine Saxham nor Rhona Helvellyn happen to be married women!"

"Perhaps not; but Patrine is an Advanced Thinker, and Rhona Helvellyn is a Militant Suffragist."

Franky commented:

"As for Suffragists, that Club of yours is stiff with 'em. Gassing about their Cause. . . . I loathe the noisy crowd!"

"Then you loathe me! I share their convictions!" Margot proclaimed. "I hold the faith that Woman's Day will dawn with the passing of the Bill that gives us the Vote. . . ."

"My best child, you wouldn't know what to do with the Vote if you had it."

Margot retorted:

"I cannot expect my husband to treat me as a reasonable being while the State classes his wife with infants and imbeciles."

It will be seen that a very pretty squabble was on the point of developing. Fortunately, at this juncture a valet of the chambers knocked at the door to say that a waiter from the restaurant begged to know whether Milord and Miladi would take lunch *à la carte*, or prefer something special in their own apartments?

"Tell him no!" wailed Miladi, to the unconcealed consternation of Milord, who had a healthy appetite.

"Must keep up your pecker—never say die!" Franky, stimulated by the pangs of hunger, developed an unsuspected talent for diplomacy. "Look here! We must talk over things quietly and calmly. I'll order a taxi, and we'll chuff to that jolly little restaurant in the Bois de Boulogne—

where you can grub in the open air under a rose-pergola—and order something special and odd——"

Since Eve's day, this lure has never failed to catch a woman. Margot began to dry her eyes. Then she asked Franky to ring.

"Three times, please. . . . That's for Pauline; I want another handkerchief."

"Have two or three while you're about it," advised Franky, obeying, returning, and perching on the arm of the settee. "And bathe your eyes a bit, have a swab-over of the pinky cream-stuff, and a dab of powder." He brushed some pale mealy traces from his right-arm sleeve and coat-lapel, ending, "And put on your swankiest hat and come along to Nadier's."

"Could we get anything to eat at Nadier's that we couldn't get here—or in London, at the Tarlton or the Rocroy? . . ."

"Stacks of things! For instance—*Canard à la presse*. . . . They squeeze the juice out of the duck, you twig, with a silver kind of squozzer, and cook it on a chafing-dish under your nose. Look here! . . ." Franky, now desperate, produced his watch. "All the cushiest little tables will be taken if you don't look sharp."

"Not on the day of the Grand Prix!"

Franky retorted, spurred to maddest invention by the pangs of hunger:

"My best child, there are about a hundred thousand wealthy Americans in Paris who don't care a red cent about racing, while with most of 'em—to eat *canard à la presse* at Nadier's in the Bois de Boulogne in the June season—is a—kind of religious rite!"

So Margot disappeared to dab her eyes and apply the prescribed touches of perfumed cream and powder, and duly reappeared, crowned with the most marvellous hat that ever promenaded the *ateliers* of the Maison Blin on the head of a milliner's *mannequin*.

You are to imagine the tiny thing and her Franky seated

—not in one of the smart automobiles that wait for hire outside Spitz's, but in a little red taxi, borne along with the broad double stream of traffic of every description that ceaselessly roared east and west under the now withering red-and-white blossoms of the chestnut-trees of the Avenue of the Champs Elysées, inhaling the stimulating breezes—flavoured with hot dust and petrol, Seine stink, sewer-gas, coffee, patchouli, fruit, Régie tobacco and roses—of Paris in the end of June.

All the world and his wife might be at Longchamps, but here were people enough and to spare. Luxurious people in costly automobiles or carriages drawn by shiny high-steppers. People in little public taxis, men and women on motor-bicycles and the human-power kind. People of all stamps and classes, clustered like bees outside the big, smelly, top-heavy auto-buses, soon to vanish from the Paris avenues and boulevards, with the red and yellow and green-flagged taxis, to play their part in the transport and nourishment of the Army of France. People of all ranks and classes on foot, though as of old the *midinette* with her big cardboard bandbax, the military cadet, or the student of Art or Medicine, the seminarist and the shaggy-haired and bearded man with the deadly complexion, the slouch hat, the aged *paletôt* and the soiled and ragged crimson necktie that distinguish the milder breed of Anarchist, made up the crowd upon the sidewalks, liberally peppered with the sight-seeing stranger of British, American, or Teuton nationality—the brilliantly-complexioned, gaily-plumaged, loudly-perfumed lady of the pavements; the gendarme and the National Guard, and—with Marie or Jeannette proudly hanging on his elbow—Rosalie in her black-leather scabbard dangling by his side, his crimson *képi* tilted rakishly—the blue-coated, red-trousered French infantryman, the *poilu* whom we have learned to love.

The Bois was not seething with fashionable life as it would

be towards the sunset hour. The dandy Clubmen, the smart ladies, had gone to Longchamps with the four-in-hands. Polo was going on near the Pont de Suresnes, the band of a regiment of Cuirassiers was playing in the Jardin d'Acclimatation, and Hungarian zithers and violins discoursed sweet music on a little gilded platform at the axial point of Nadier's open-air restaurant—which is shaped like a half-wheel, with pergolas of shower-roses and Crimson Ramblers radiating from the gilded band-stand to the outer circle of little white tables at which one can lunch or dine in fine weather under a light screen of leaves and blossoms, beneath which the green canvas awnings can be drawn when it comes on to rain.

The tables were crowded with French people taking late *déjeuner*, and English, Germans, and German-Americans having lunch. The gravelled courtyard before the terrace was packed with showy automobiles.

If *canard à la presse* did not grace the meal supplied to Franky and Margot on Nadier's terrace, the *potage printanière* and *écrevisses* and a *blanquette d'agneau* were exquisitely cooked and served. Asparagus and a salad of endive followed, and by the time they had emptied a bottle of Château Yquem and the *omelette soufflée* had given place to *Pêches Melba*, Margot had smiled several times and laughed once.

She was so dainty and sweet, so brilliant a little human humming-bird, that the laughing, chattering, feasting crowd of smartly or extravagantly dressed people gathered about the other trellis-screened tables under Nadier's rose-pergola sent many a curious or admiring glance her way. And Franky was very proud of his young wife, and theirs had been undeniably a love-match; yet in spite of the good dishes and the excellent Château Yquem, little shivers of chilly premonition rippled over him from time to time. He had got to speak out—definitely decline, in the interests of Posterity, to permit interference on the part of Margot's

Club circle in his private domestic affairs. . . . How to do it effectively yet inoffensively was a problem that strained his brain-capacity. Yet—again in the interests of Posterity—Franky had never previously interested himself in Posterity—the thing had to be done. He refused Roquefort, buttered a tiny biscuit absently, put it down undecidedly, and as the waiter whisked his plate away—conjured crystal bowls of tepid rose-water and other essentials from space, and vanished in search of dessert—he spoke, assuming for the first time in his five months' experience of connubial life the toga of marital authority.

"I think, do you know, Kittums"—Kittums was Margot's pet name—"that it will be best to face the music!"

"*Connu!*" Margot shrugged a little, widely opening her splendid brown eyes, "But what music?"

"The"—Franky took the plunge—"the cradle-music, if you will have it!"

Margot's gasp of dismay, and the indignant fire of a stare that was quenched in brine, awakened Franky to the fact of his having failed in tactics. The return of the waiter with a pyramid of superb strawberries and a musk-melon on cracked ice alone stemmed the outburst of the pent-up flood of reproach. Entrenched behind the melon, Franky waited. The waiter again effaced himself, and Margot said from behind another handkerchief:

"Oh, how *could* you! . . . I never *dreamed* that I should *live* to hear you speak to me in that way."

Over the melon, whose rough green quartered rind had delicate white raised traceries all over it, suggesting outline maps of countries in Fairyland, Franky curiously regarded his wife. He said:

"Why are you and all your friends so funky of—what's only a natural phe—what do you call it? . . . What do men and women marry for, if it isn't to have—children? . . . Perhaps you'll answer me?"

"What do people marry for?" Margot regarded him

indignantly over the neglected pyramid of luscious, tempting strawberries, "To—to be happy together—to have a clinking time!" Her voice shook. "And this is to be a gorgeous season. Balls—balls! right on from now to the end of July—then from the autumn all through winter. Period Costume Balls, reviving the modes, music, and manners of Ancient Civilisations—Carthagenian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Gothic—got up and arranged by the Committees of the Cercle Moderne, here in Paris, and in London by the New Style Club. . . . Tony Guisseguignol and Paul Peigault and their set are busy designing the dresses and decorations—nothing like them will ever have been seen! And—Peigault says—Tango and the Maxixe are to be chucked to the little cabbages. A new dance is coming from São Paulo that will simply wipe them out. . . . And now—just when I was looking forward—when everything was to have been so splendid——"

The shaking voice choked upon a note of anguish. Franky had picked up the melon, quite unconsciously, and was balancing it. At this juncture he gripped the green globe with both hands, and said, summoning all his courage to meet the agonised appeal of Margot's tear-drenched eyes:

"Look here. This is—strict Bridge. . . . Do you loathe 'em—the kiddies—so horribly that the idea of having any is hateful to you? Or is it—not only the—the veto it puts on larking and kickabout and—the temporary disfigurement—you're afraid of—but the—the—the inevitable pain?" He glanced round cautiously and looked back again at his wife, saying in a low voice: "Nobody's listening. . . . Tell me frankly. . . ." He waited an instant, and then said in an urgent whisper. "Answer me! . . . For God's sake, tell the frozen truth, Margot!"

## CHAPTER III

### FAIR ROSAMOND'S CHOICE

THE terrace under Nadier's roses—dotted with little tables covered with napery, silver, crystal, and china, surrounded with laughing, chattering feasters—the terrace was no longer a scene out of a comedy of the lighter side of Parisian life. . . . Tragedy, pale and awe-inspiring in her ink-black mantle and purple chiton, had stepped across the gravel in her gold-buckled leather buskins, to offer to the girlish bride—a piece of human porcelain, prinked in the height of the fashion, and lovely—with her wild-rose cheeks and little uptilted nose, her floss-silk hair and wide, dark, lustrous deer-eyes—Fair Rosamond's choice, the dagger or the bowl. . . .

"Yes—yes. . . . It is the ugliness of the thing! . . ." The little mouth was pulled awry as though it had sipped of verjuice. The tiny hands knotted themselves convulsively, and the colour fled in terror from her face. "The grotesque ugliness. . . . And the"—the last two words came as though a pang had wrung them from the pale lips—"the pain—the awful pain! And besides—my mother died when I was born!" Margot's voice was a fluttering, appealing whisper; her great eyes were dilated and wild with terror. "Perhaps that is why I am so deadly afraid"—she caught her breath—"but there are heaps, heaps, *heaps* of married women who fear—*that*—equally! And they arrange to escape it—I don't know how! . . . For I knew—nothing—when I married you! . . ." She lifted her great eyes to Franky's, and he realised that it had been so, actually. "I've been ashamed ever to confess that I was—ignorant about these things! . . . I've talked a

language—amongst other women—that I didn't understand! . . . "

There are moments when even the shallow-brained become clairvoyant. Franky's love for her made him see clear. He looked back down the vista of Margot's twenty years of existence, and saw her the motherless daughter of a self-absorbed, cultivated, Art-loving valetudinarian, who habitually spent the chillier part of each year in ranging from French to Italian health-resorts, occupying the spring with Art in Paris—returning to London for June and July, generally spending August and September in Devonshire—to take flight Southwards before the migrating swallows, at the first chill breath of October frosts.

Margot had been educated at home, down in Devonshire, by a series of certificated female tutors. The spinster aunt, the younger sister of her father, extended to her niece for a liberal remuneration a nominal protection and an indifferent care. . . . And Mr. Mountjohn had died when the girl was sixteen, leaving her unconditionally heiress to his considerable fortune, and the aunt had let Margot have her head in every imaginable way. She had allowed her to take up her residence at the "Ladies' Social" Club three years subsequently, on the sole condition that a responsible chaperon accompanied Margot to Society functions. Hence, Mrs. Ponsonby Rewes, the irreproachable widow of a late King's Messenger, was evoked from Kensington Tower Mansions upon these occasions—by telephone—to vanish when no longer wanted, in the discreetest and most obliging way.

"Poor little Margot! . . . . Poor little woman! . . ." Franky could see how it all had happened by the wild light of the great deer-eyes, so like those in the portrait of the girl's dead mother—half Irish, half Greek by birth.

While Franky reflected, the tables had been emptying. People were hurrying away to hear the band of the Jardin d'Acclimatation or to fulfil other engagements of a sea-

sonable kind. Some remained to smoke and-gossip over liqueurs and coffee. The light blue wreaths of cigar and cigarette smoke curled up towards the awning overhead. Franky mechanically produced his own case and lighted up. And Margot, stretching a slender arm across the table, was saying:

"Give me one!—I've forgotten mine! . . ."

"Ought you? . . . Is it wise? . . ." Franky was on the point of asking, but his good Angel must have clapped a hand before his mouth. He silently gave Margot a thick, masculine Sobranie and supplied a light; and as their young faces neared and the red spark glowed, and the first smoke-wreath rose between the approximating tubes of delicate tobacco-filled paper, his wife whispered as their eyes met:

"You're hurt! But now you know—you're sorry for me, aren't you?" It was a dragging, plaintive undertone, not at all like Margot's voice.

"Frightfully! All the more because"—Franky drew so hard at his cigarette that it burned one-sidedly—"I can't help being thundering—glad!"

"I—see! . . ."

She breathed out the words with a thin stream of fragrant Turkish vapour crawling over her scarlet under-lip, it seemed to Franky, like a pale blue worm. And he bit through his Sobranie and threw it on his dessert-plate, saying desperately:

"Not yet. Will you listen quietly to what I've got to say?"

She nodded. Franky launched himself upon the tide of revelation. Nearly everybody who had been eating when he had come into Nadier's with Margot had got up and gone away. And the Cuirassiers band was playing the love-music from *Samson et Dalila* on the terrace of the Jardin d'Acclimatation, as melodiously as only a French military band can play.

"It's got to do with the Peerage. Only a Second Afghan War-Earldom dating from 1879—tacked on to the Viscounty they gave my great-grandfather after Badajos—but worth having in its way, or the Dad wouldn't have accepted it. And, naturally enough—I want a boy to take the Viscounty when I succeed my father, and have the Earldom when I've absquatulated, just as the kiddy'll want one when his own time comes."

Margot was burning a strawberry-leaf on her plate with her cigarette-end. She asked, impressing another little yellow scorched circle on the surface of rough green:

"Would it matter so very much if there wasn't any boy?"

Franky jumped and turned red to the white, unsunned circle left by the field-cap on the summit of his high forehead.

"It would matter—lots! For my Uncle Sherbrand, a younger brother of my father's, would come in for the Viscounty when I succeeded the dear old Dad. And my Uncle Sherbrand is a blackguard! Got cashiered in 1900, when he was an Artillery officer in a gun-testing billet at Wanwich. Kicked out of the Army—in War-time, mind you!—for not backing up his C.O. And the brute has got a son, too, an apprentice in an engine-shop, if he isn't actually a chauffeur. Probably the young fellow's respectable, and of course it ain't the pup's fault he's got such a sire. But my Dad would turn in his grave at the idea of being succeeded by the brother who disgraced him—and as for *his* grandfather—the jolly old cock 'ud bally well get up and dance, I should say. . . . So, you see, I can't—sympathise with you as you want me to do in this, darling! I want you to buck up and be cheerful, and face the music like a brick. . . . As for what you've told me—about your mother——" In spite of himself, Franky gulped, and little shiny beads of sweat stood upon his cheeks and temples. "That sort of thing doesn't run in families, like rheumatism" —he was getting idiotic—"or Roman noses! Be plucky—and everything will turn out all right. Can't possibly go

wrong if we call in Saxham . . . Saxham of 000, Harley Street—man my sister Trix simply swears by. Brought her boy Ronald into the world thirteen years ago, and successfully operated on him for appendicitis only the other day! . . . "

Margot looked at Franky attentively and bent her head slightly. Had she understood? She must have. . . . Had she tacitly agreed? Of course. . . .

## CHAPTER IV

### RAYMOND OF THE S. AË. F.

THE Masculine Will had conquered. You had only to be firm with women—bless their hearts! and they caved directly. . . . Couldn't hold out. . . . Not built that way. . . . Franky's sternly-clamped upper-lip relaxed. He beamed as he proposed a noonday stroll in the Bois. In the direction of the bigger Lake, by one of the narrower avenues, or if Margot preferred a look-in at the Polo Club, another avenue, intersecting the Allée de Longchamps and skirting the enclosure of the Gun Club, would take them there in a jiffy, *via* Bagatelle.

Margot assented to the latter proposition, and, with a little flutter of the lips Franky accepted as a smile, reached for her egret stole, a filmy feathery thing she had removed on entering Nadier's, and drew on her long mousquetaire gloves and pulled down her veil of sunset *chiffon*, half shaded red, merging into jonquil yellow matching the shade of her marvellous gown. And Franky paid the bill in plump English sovereigns (invariably exchanged as good for louis of twenty francs by the suave and smiling waiter) and tipped the said waiter extravagantly, and took his hat from the second waiter (who invariably starts up by the side of the first when you are going) and tipped him, and got his stick from the third waiter (who came forward with this, and the *en tout cas* of Madame—a lovely thing in the latest dome-shape, of black net over jonquil colour, with a flounce, and an ivory stick, upon the top of which sat a green monkey in olivines, eating a ruby fruit), and lighted another cigarette, and returned the elaborate bow of the manager with a nod of the cheerful patronising order as he followed Margot through

the Rambler-wreathed archway leading by a flight of shallow steps from Nadier's terrace to the wide carriage-sweep that links the broad Allée de Longchamps with the narrower Route de Madrid. And the towering plume of her astonishing hat brought down a shower of red rose-petals as she passed out before him—and Franky, with some of these on his top-hat-brim and others nestling in the front of his waistcoat, was irresistibly reminded of their wedding-day.

Unconsciously, Franky and Margot quitted the broader, more frequented avenue, crowded with people in carriages, people in automobiles, people on motor-bicycles and bicyclettes, and followed narrower pathways, stretching between green lawns adorned with shrubberies and clumps of stately forest trees, and chiefly patronised by sweethearting couples, nursemaids in charge of children, children in domineering but affectionate charge of white-haired ladies, while venerable gentlemen dozed on rustic benches over the columns of *Figaro* or *Paris Midi*.

When even these figures became rare, it was borne in upon Franky that he and Margot were not upon a path that led to the Grounds of the Polo Club. Reluctantly, he admitted himself lost.

"Does it matter? . . ." Margot's voice was weary. "If you're absolutely set on it, we could ask one of those men in cocked hats and waxed moustaches and red-and-yellow shoulder-cords to give us the straight tip. But I don't feel the least bit keen about the Polo Club any more than the Lakes. These alleys are quiet, and the grass is nice and green. I vote we go on."

"Madame cannot pass this way. It is not open for strangers."

A Republican Guard, a good-looking *sous-officier*, had spoken, comprehending the tone rather than the English words.

"Why not?" Margot's eyes suddenly brightened. She eagerly sniffed the air of the forbidden avenue. The cor-

poral, indicating with his white-gloved hand other Republican Guards posted at equal distances down the prohibited alley, and at its intersection with another some two hundred yards distant, brought his eyes back to Margot to answer:

"Madame, for the reason that certain military operations are taking place here to-day."

"But my husband is an English officer—" Margot was beginning, when Franky, reddening to his hat-brim, exhorted her to be quiet, and the Republican Guard, civilly saluting, stepped upon the grass and moved away.

"All the same, you are an English officer," Margot persisted, "and what use is the Entente if that doesn't count?"

"Best child, don't be a giddy goose!" Franky implored her. "You don't suppose the Authorities care a bad tomato for an English Loot—what they'd cotton to would have to be a British Brass Hat of the very biggest kind. Look there!—more to your left, little battums!" He indicated yet other Republican cocked hats strung at equal distances down the length of a neighbouring alley, precisely outlining the farther border of the sandwich-shaped half-acre of greensward by which their particular avenue ran. "And there!" His professional eye had noted a big, grey-painted military motor-lorry, numbered, and lettered "S. Aë. F." Behind the driver's seat towered the slender T-shaped steel mast of a Field wireless, whose spidery aërials, pegged to the turf, were in charge of men in *képis* and blue overalls, while a non-commissioned officer, wearing the telephone head-band of the operator, leaned on the elbow-rest of the tripod supporting the apparatus, his finger on the buzzer-key. Near him his clerk squatted, pencil and pad in readiness, while at a respectful distance from two oblong patches of white in the middle of the green plat of turf, several active upright figures in dark uniforms stood conversing, or walking to and fro.

"*Officiers Aviateurs*, telegraphists and mechanics of the French *Service Aëronautique*"—you are listening to Franky

—"tremendously well-organised compared with our little footling Flying Corps, tinkered fourteen months ago out of the old Air Battalion of the R. E. These chaps are Engineers—goin' by the dark red double stripes on their overalls and their dark blue *képis*. Some of their machines'll be out for practice. Despatch-droppin' or bombs. Here's a man with brass on his hat, coming our way. . . . Takes me for a German soger-orficer I shouldn't wonder!—lots of 'em get their clothes cut in Bond Street. But though you can hide Allemand legs in English trousers"—Franky was recovering his customary cheeriness—"and some of 'em do it uncommon cleverly—you can't deodorise an accent that hails from Berlin."

The officer approaching—a youthful, upright figure walking quickly, with the short, springy steps of a man much in the saddle—proved to be grey-haired and grey-moustached. The double-winged badge of his Service was embroidered in gold upon the right sleeve of his tunic, and upon the collar, a single wing in this case, ending in a star. He carried binoculars suspended from his neck by a rolled-leather thong, and a revolver in a black-leather case was attached to the belt about his middle. There was thick white dust upon the legs and uppers of his high polished black boots, which the grass had scoured from the toes and soles. His bright blue-grey eyes ran over Franky as the slight soldierly salute was exchanged. He said, speaking in excellent English:

"If Monsieur, the English officer, will obligingly mention his name, rank, and regiment, it might be possible to allow him to continue his promenade with Madame, the invention we are testing being the patent of his countryman, and already familiar to the Authorities at the British War Office."

Thus coerced, Franky produced his card, Margot dimpled into smiles, the polite officer saluted again, introduced himself as Raymond, Capitaine-Commandant pilot of the —th *escadrille*, wheeled and walked away. But he returned to say, this time directly addressing Margot:

"Should Madame la Vicomtesse desire to witness the test of her countryman's — apparatus, there can be no objection to her doing so. But that Madame should keep clear of the vicinity of the"—he pointed to the two oblong strips of white canvas adorning the middle of the expanse of green, —"the signal, intended for the guidance of the aviator, is of absolute necessity, Madame must understand!"

"There won't be any . . .?" Margot was beginning, nervously.

"*Mais non, Madame. Pas d'explosion,*" the officer assured her, and stiffened to attention facing eastwards, and scanning the sky with eyes that blinked in the dazzling glare of early noon. For the droning whirr of a plane just then reached them, drowning the sign of the hot south breeze that rustled in the tops of the acacias and oaks, ilexes and poplars, that rose about the arena of open ground. . . .

## CHAPTER V

### THE BIRD OF WAR

"THE *avion* comes from Drancy." The speaker looked back at Margot as he focussed his binoculars. "It is not one of our Army machines, but a British monoplane built by your countryman and fitted with the invention whose usefulness we are here to test." He continued: "Should the *officier-pilote* in charge of the—apparatus—and who for the time being represents an enemy—succeed in poising"—he hesitated a bare instant—"for a stipulated number of moments over the target—those two lengths of white canvas approximating on the grass represent the target—he scores a bull's-eye."

He blinked a little, and before Franky's mental vision rose the aggregation of Government buildings near the *Carrefour des Cascades*, marked "*Magazins et depôts*" on Bædeker's maps.

"He scores a bull's eye," resumed the speaker. "He has already paid one visit of the requisite duration to an address near the Porte d'Aubervilliers." Franky had a mental vision of the array of big, bloated gasometers pertaining to the Strasbourg Railway Yards. "He has made a similar call at a point indicated between the station of the Batignolles and the station of the Avenue de Clichy"—the well-preserved teeth of the officer showed under the grey moustache as he smiled, and Franky had another vision of the huge *Gare aux Marchandises* tucked in the angle between the Railway of the Geinture and the Western Railway lines, as the speaker went on suavely "and the target succeeding this will be the last. It is situated on the Champ de Manœuvres at Issy. The wireless-telegraph operator of my

*escadrille* informs me that two bull's eyes have already been registered—which for your countryman's invention presages well."

Franky, with British plumpness, queried:

"And the invention? Some new bomb-dropping device—planned to get rid of the way the engine always puts on 'em? If the English inventor-fellow has done *that*, his goods are worth buying, I should say!"

Raymond, *Capitaine-Commandant*, answered as the droning song from the sky grew louder:

"Of certainty, Monsieur, if his invention prove worth buying, my Government will undoubtedly purchase what has already been unavailingly offered to yours. It is our custom to examine and test, closely and exhaustively, new things that are offered. But what would you? We seek the best for France."

"He isn't flying his aëroplane himself, is he? Or working his own invention, whatever it may be?"

"But no, Madame! One of our *Officiers-Aviateurs* is acting as pilot, a skilled mechanic of our Service occupies the observer's place. Despite the Entente Cordiale—the happy relations prevailing between my country and England—it would hardly be *convenable* or discreet to permit even an Englishman"—the tone of graceful, subtle irony cannot be conveyed by pen or type—"*even* an Englishman to fly over Paris, or any other fortified city of France. But see! In the sky to the north-east—above that silvery puff of vapour—arrives now the *avion* built and christened by your countryman."

Margot asked, narrowing her beautiful eyes as she searched out the darkish speck upon the hot blue background:

"The plane, you mean. What does he call it?"

Raymond answered without removing his eyes from his binoculars:

"Madame, he calls it 'The Bird of War.'"

The tuff-tuff of a motor-cycle sounded faintly in the distance, as the resonant vibrating noise of the aëroplane came more triumphantly out of the hot blue sky. Save for a scintillating white reflection to the north that might have been the crystal dome of the great big Palm House in the Jardin d'Acclimatation, and that unavoidable, useful ugliness, the gilded lantern of the Tour Eiffel, thrusting up into the middle distance over the delicately-rounded masses of new foliage upon the right-hand looking east, the glory and shame and magnificence and squalor of the Queen City of Cities might have lain a hundred leagues away, so ringed-in by delicate austere brown of serried tree-trunks, rising above rich clumps of blossoming lilac, syringa, yellow azalea, and pink, mauve, and snowy rhododendron, was the spacious green arena wherein Franky and Margot were destined to play their part.

Now, followed by the wide-winged shadow that the sun of high noon threw almost directly beneath her, darkening drifting cloud, and open city spaces, passing over breasting tree-tops and wide stretches of municipal greensward, the Bird of War drew nearer and more near. . . . And glancing up as the portentous flying shadow suddenly blotted out the sunlight, Franky realised that the two-seater monoplane was hovering, and buzzing as she hovered, like a Brobdingnagian combination of kite-hawk, dragon-fly, and bumble-bee.

He pulled out a pair of vest-pocket field-glasses and scanned her as she hung there, gleaming in the sunlight, at a height of perhaps five hundred feet above the white cloths on the grass. He could make out the Union Jack on her underwings, the huge black raking capitals of her name BIRD OF WAR painted on the side of the tapering canvas-covered fuselage, the diamond-shaped tail swaying between the pendant flaps of the huge triangular elevators, clearly as though these features had been filmed upon the screen. In a curious misty circle, spinning under the fuselage, he

suspected lay the secret of her kite-like poise and hover, and behind his immaculate waistcoat he was sensible of a thrill.

If the English inventor had not solved the baffling Problem of Stability, he had come uncommonly near it, by the Great Brass Hat! And the dud-heads at Whitehall had shown the door to him and his invention. "Good Christmas!—how like 'em!" reflected Franky, lowering the glasses to chuckle, and looking round for Margot.

There she was, some twenty yards distant, planted right in the middle of the avenue, lost to the wide in rapt contemplation of the hovering aëroplane.

"Kitts!" he called, but she did not hear, or disdained to pay attention. He tried to call again, but his mouth dried up and his feet seemed rooted to the ground. For, swinging round the turf-banked corner of the avenue at its junction with another, charging at a terrific pace down upon the little brilliant creature, came a whity-brown figure on a motor-cycle, the frantic honking of its horn and the racket of its engine's open throttle mingling deafeningly with the tractor's roar.

## CHAPTER VI

### SHERBRAND

THE frantic honking of the pneumatic horn was lost in the crashing collision of earth and metal. Franky, pallid and damp with apprehension, reassured himself by a rapid glance that Margot was safe and sound. The aëroplane had ceased buzzing and hovering, headed southwards, and floated on, trailing her shadow, leaving the traces of her passage in a smear of brown earth indicating a vicious slash made by the right-side foot-rest of a motor-cycle in the greensward, conserved and sacred to the French Republic—the upset machine to which the foot-rest appertained, and an angry young man in dusty overalls, sitting in the middle of the raked-up avenue.

"You've had a spill! . . ." Franky heard himself saying.

"Yes. . . . I *have* had a spill—thanks to that young lady!"

The dusty young man's tone was frankly savage; he regarded the brilliant little figure in the distance with a scowl of resentment as he gathered himself up from the gravel, and dabbed at a jagged, oozing cut on his prominent chin with a handkerchief of Isabella hue. "The brake-handle did that," he curtly explained, more for his own benefit than apologetic Franky's. But he looked full in the flushed and dewy countenance of Margot's lord as he added:

"If I'd killed her, a French jury would have found that she deserved it!—running like a corncrake across the avenue when I was scorching up at top speed! . . ."

"I know," Franky stammered. "I—I see how it all happened. You had to steer slap into the bank—to save

my—my wife's life. How can I apologise? . . . You see, she was crazy about the aëroplane. . . . She'd been warned to keep well out of the way—you know what women are! . . ."

"Oh, as to that! . . ." The dusty young man, moving with a perceptible limp, went to the prone motor-cycle, stood it up on its bent stand with one twist of his big-boned wrist, and began to examine into its injuries. "Not much wrong," he said to himself, and straightened his back, and in the act of throwing a leg over the saddle, felt Franky's restraining grip upon his arm.

"You don't go until my wife has thanked you!" Franky's upper-lip was Rhadamanthine. "Margot!" he called, in a tone of authority such as he had never previously heard from his own mouth; "Come here at once, please! I want to speak to you!"

The fluttering little figure waved a hand to him. The gay little voice called back:

"Yes. . . . Oh!—but look at them! . . . Can they be going? Why, I believe they are! . . ."

The canvas strips had been rolled up by a mechanician of the Service Aëronautique, and stowed away behind the big grey telegraph-car, in the recesses of which the telescopic steel mast and aërials of the wireless had been snugly tucked away. The mechanics in *képis* and overalls had stowed themselves away inside the *camion;* the wireless operator, a *képi* having replaced his headband, was acting as chauffeur. And, occupying the front seat beside a junior officer, who piloted a second, smaller car, Raymond, *Capitaine-Commandant pilot* of the —th *escadrille* of France's Service Aëronautique gave the signal for departure with an upward wave of his hand. Then, with some sharp, staccato trills of a whistle and the double honk of a pneumatic horn, the car of the commandant turned and sped down the avenue, followed by the tractor-waggon; and both were lost to view.

"But—they're gone! . . . And—and the aëroplane. . . ."

Margot gasped out the words in amazed discomfiture, sending her eyes after a dwindling shape beating down the sky to the southward, and straining her ears to catch the last of the tractor's whirring song.

"Nearly at Issy, I should calculate—travelling at eighty miles an hour. Impossible now to catch up with her in time to see her do the last stunt. Can choose my own pace for going, anyhow," said the motor-cyclist ruefully. "Nothing left to do but take the Bird over and fly her back to the Drancy hangar."

He tried to laugh, but his wrung face gave the lie to the plucky pretence of indifference. He went on, still doggedly mopping away at his bleeding chin:

"I was lucky in getting a hearing on this side of the Channel. The bigwigs at Whitehall simply referred me to the Superintendent of the Royal Aircraft Factory at Frayborough, and as I'd tried him twice already, I knew what *he'd* got to say. The Commander of the Central School of Military Aviation was a brick—I'll say that for him. He sent a French flying officer to look me up at Hendon, who got me in touch with the Inventions Bureau of their *Service Aëronautique*. . . . Well! the big test's over by this time. I shall know my fate in a week or two—or possibly in a year?''

"Oh! You don't mean——"

The horrified cry broke from Margot. Franky yelled:

"By the Great Brass Hat! . . . You're the inventor! The whole thing was your show!"

"Yes, I'm the inventor," the tanned young man in the dusty overalls answered rather contemptuously: "What did you take me for? . . . A French medical student having a joy-ride, or a *commis voyageur?*"

"Can't say. Never thought! . . . Fact is—my wife had frightened me horribly. When your machine bore down on her—posted right in the middle of the gravel—I was scared stiff—give you my honour!—you might have sunk a brace of Dreadnoughts in the palms of my hands!"

Franky made this absurd statement with so sincere an air, and clinched it so effectually by displaying a lovely silk-cambric handkerchief in a state of soppy limpness, that the abrased inventor nearly laughed.

But his thick, silvery, fair eyebrows settled into a straight line across his tanned forehead. He said with a directness that seemed to belong to his lean, keen, hatchet-faced type:

"Once more, I am glad that no harm has happened to the lady. The delay caused by the—mishap can hardly have prejudiced my success. For all I know, the test of my hoverer may have favourably impressed the judges. If it has done otherwise I have no right to blame man, dog, or devil, for a failure that may be my own."

He lifted his goggled cap to Margot with a good air, pulled it down, and was in the act of lowering the visor, when Margot's voice arrested the big-boned hand. That voice Franky knew could be wonderfully coaxing. It pleaded now, soft as the sigh of a Mediterranean breeze:

"Whether the test is successful or isn't, will you promise that we shall hear from you? . . ."

"Good egg!" joined in Franky. "Do let us know! . . . We're stopping at the Spitz, Place Vendôme." He warmed and grew expansive in the light of Margot's smile of approval. "Drop in on us there," he urged, "as soon as you've found out. Come and dine with us in any case. . . . No!—we're engaged to-night, but come and lunch at two sharp to-morrow, and tell us all about your hoverer over a bottle of Bubbly. Suite 10, Second Floor. Name of Norwater. Stick this away to remind you," he ended, tendering his card.

"You're awfully good. But at the same time I hardly——"

The voice broke off. A glance at the proffered pasteboard had dyed the inventor flaming scarlet from the collar of his dusty gabardine to the edges of his goggled cap. He dropped the card quietly upon the gravel, and said, looking Franky straight between the eyes:

"Even if I were able to accept I'd have to decline your invitation. My name's Sherbrand—I'm your Uncle Alan's son." He settled himself in the saddle and finished before he pulled up the starting-lever. "Understand—I'd no idea who you were until I saw the name on your card. It has been a queer encounter—I can't say a pleasant one. Let me end it by saying 'Good-day!' . . ."

Franky's new-found cousin touched the goggled cap and pulled up the starting-lever. With the customary bang and snort, the motor-bicycle leaped away. Margot had uttered a little gasp at the moment of revelation. Now she turned great eyes of dismay on Franky, and withdrew them quickly. For Franky's eyes had become circular and poppy, his mouth tried to shape itself into a whistle, but his expression was merely vacuous. He continued to explode with "Great Snipe!" at intervals, as he and Margot made their way back to more populous avenues, chartered a fortuitously passing taxi, and were driven back *via* the Porte Dauphine to Spitz's gorgeous caravanserai in the Place Vendôme, when Margot vanished into her own bower, sending her French maid to intimate to Milord that Miladi would take tea alone in that apartment, and did not intend to dine.

Thus Franky, relieved from duty, presently found himself, in company with a cigar, strolling bachelor-fashion through the streets of Paris. No very clear recollection stayed with him of how he spent the afternoon. At one time he found himself with his features glued against the plate-glass window of a celebrated establishment dedicated to the culture and restoration of feminine beauty, contemplating divers gilt wigs on stands—porcelain pots of marvellous unguents, warranted to eliminate wrinkles; sachets of mystic herbs to be immersed in baths; creams guaranteed to impart to the most exhausted skin the velvety freshness of infancy.

Later he strayed into a sunny, green-turfed public garden, full of white statues, sparkling fountains, and municipal

seats whereon Burgundian, Dalmatian, and Alsatian wet-nurses dandled or rocked or nourished their infant charges, and *bonnes* or governesses presided over the gambols of older babies, who played with belled Pierrots, or toy automobiles, or inflated balls of gorgeous hues.

There is nothing profoundly moving in the sight of a stout, beribboned wet-nurse suckling her employer's infant. But into the company of these important hirelings came quite unconsciously a young working-woman in a shabby brown merino skirt and a blouse of white Swiss. Her shining black hair was uncovered to the sunshine. On one arm she carried a bouncing baby, on the other a basket containing cabbages and onions, and a flask of cheap red wine, which receptacle its owner, having taken the other end of the seat Franky occupied, set down between herself and the young man. She was a healthy, plump young woman with too pronounced a moustache for beauty. But when, having methodically turned the baby upside down to rearrange some detail of its scanty dress, she reversed it and bared her breast to the eager mouth, a strange thrill went through Franky. A dimness came before his vision, and it was as though those dimpled hands plucked at his heart. He suffered a sudden revulsion strange in a young man so modern, up-to-date, and beautifully tailored. He knew that he longed for a son most desperately. And the devil of it was—Margot did not.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE CONSOLATRIX

Thus, Franky got up and moved away, driven by the stinging cloud of thoughts that pursued and battened on him, and presently found himself following a stream of people up a flight of marble steps, and under an imposing portico that ended in a turnstile and a National Collection of Paintings and Sculptures.

Wandering through a maze of long skylighted galleries where the master-works of Modern Art are conserved and cherished, he was to encounter the thought that haunted him in a myriad of images, wrought by the chisel, the brush, the burin, and the graving-tool in marble or bronze, upon canvas or panel, in ivory, or silver, or enamel, or gold.

A sculptured Hagar mourning by the side of her dying Ishmael caught his eye as he entered the first gallery. Farther on, Eve after the Fall lifted the infant Cain to receive the kiss of Adam, homing to his shack of green branches at the end of the labouring day. And a shag-thighed, curly-horned Pan romped with a litter of sturdy bear-cubs, and medallions and panels of childhood were everywhere.

It was the same in the galleries devoted to painting. A Breton christening-party, depicted with the roughness that hides consummate mastery of technique, trudged along a snowy coast-road towards a little chapel near the seashore. The young mother in her winged starched cap and bodice of black velvet, yet pale from the ordeal of anguish, walked between her smiling gossips, carrying her new-born infant, chrysalis-like in its linen swaddlings, to be made into a good Christian by M. le Curé. And seated on a broken throne of

red granite beneath the towering propylæum of a ruined Egyptian temple, whose colonnades of lotus columns, and walls painted with processions of hierophants offering incense to bird or beast-headed deities, and bewigged dancers and musicians ministering to the pleasures of long-eyed kings, receded down long perspectives into distance, a Woman, young and slender and draped in a long blue cloak over a white robe, gazed downwards at a naked Child sleeping upon her knees. And about the downy temples of the Child shone a slender ring of mystic brightness, and another, more faint, haloed the chastely beautiful head of the Mother bending above.

Another canvas, austere and gorgeous, with the marvellous blues and emeralds and rich deep crimsons of old Byzantine ornament in relief against a background of dull tawny gold, showed the same maternal figure, far older and in darker draperies, seated upon a chair of wrought ivory upon a daïs, looking outward and upward with deep eyes of unfathomable tenderness and sorrow, and pale hands lifted in supplication to that Heaven whither Her Son ascended after His Victory over Death. Across the knees of the Consolatrix Afflictorum a mourning mother lay prone and tearless. And at the feet of the Virgin, outstretched amidst the scattered petals of some fallen roses, you saw the nude, beautiful body of a male child of some three years old.

But little of the inner meaning of Bouguereau's great picture filtered through Franky's honest brown eyes to the mind that lay somewhere behind them. But he realised that for the grieving woman who had borne a son and lost him there was no more joy in the world.

The Child of that Woman upon whose knees she leaned her breaking heart had lived to attain to the perfect ripeness of glorious Manhood. But then. . . . Franky followed the lines of the dark, downward-drifting veil up to the rapt Mother-face with the sorrowful, close-folded mouth and the

deep, fathomless eyes, and remembered what had happened to Her Son.

"Beg pardon!" he found himself muttering between his teeth. His hand went up, and he had bared his sleek brown head before he knew. This wasn't a Roman Catholic Church, anyway . . . there was no obligation even to appear respectful; France had long ago kicked over the traces of Religion—all French people were Freethinkers in these days. Telling himself this, Franky did not replace the shiny topper. One rapid glance to right and left had shown him that the gallery was nearly empty; the few visitors it contained were too far distant to have observed the action. Except, possibly, one person, a lean, short, elderly man in shabby black, who stood some paces behind, a little to the left of Franky, holding a shovel-brimmed round-crowned beaver with both hands against his sunken chest as he gazed with bright, absorbed eyes at the wonderful rapt face of the Consoler; his lips moving rapidly as he whispered to himself, not breaking off or twitching a muscle because Franky had glanced round:

Franky glanced round again, and this time encountered the oddly young eyes of his neighbour, looking from a brown, deeply wrinkled visage framed in thickly growing, straight black hair, heavily streaked with white.

"Monsieur is a lover of Art?"

Undoubtedly a Frenchman, he addressed Franky in cultured English, with a tone and manner excellently graced. The vivid clearness of his amber-coloured eyes, set in the now smiling mask of walnut-brown wrinkles, was attractive. And Franky answered, unconsciously warming to the look and smile:

"Must say I hardly know. Things that clever, intellectual people go into raptures over, bore me simply stiff. Other things—things they howl down—go straight to the spot, you see. And all I can say when I'm hauled over the coals for

liking rubbish is, that the rubbish is good enough for this child."

"I comprehend. Monsieur has the courage of his convictions. It is a quality rare in these days. And—this painting particularly appeals to Monsieur? May one be pardoned for asking why?"

The voice was suave, but it somehow compelled an answer. Franky, with an indistinct remembrance of *viva voce* examinations awakening in him, cleared his throat and fell back a pace or two. . . . Well set up and well-bred, well-groomed and well-dressed, his figure, beside that other in the priestly soutane of rusty alpaca, short enough to reveal coarse ribbed stockings of black yarn, and cracked prunella shoes with worn steel buckles, made a contrast sufficiently quaint to provoke a stare of curiosity, had any observer passed just then. But standing together on the beeswaxed floor at the upper end of the long, bright, skylighted gallery, the Guardsman and his temporary acquaintance were as private as it is possible to be in a public place.

Thus, at the cost of a heightened complexion and an occasional stammer, Franky explained himself. The painting appealed to him because it recalled a Bible story—made familiar to Franky by reason of having swotted it at School for Sunday Ques. with other fellows of the Fifth in Greyshott's time. Also, on the wind-up Sunday of his, Franky's, Last Term, having passed for the Army with the dev—hem! —of a lot of trouble—a beastly epidemic of diphtheria and scarlet fever having broken out among the children of the Windsor poor, the Head had preached from the text in Big Chapel. And the text went something like this:

*"A Voice in Rama was heard, of lamentation and mourning: Rachel bewailing her children: and would not be comforted because they are not."*

The haggard, beautiful, tearless Rachel of the picture hadn't bucked at the disfigurement and the pain and the danger of child-bearing. She had welcomed them for the

sake of the kid. . . . It was a thundering pity he hadn't lived—in Franky's opinion; "woman jolly well deserved to have been let keep that clinking fine boy to rear."

"I comprehend." The clear eyes flashed into Franky's, the withered brown mask was alight with sympathetic intelligence. "To Monsieur, an English officer and a member of the Protestant Church of England, that woman who leans her bursting heart upon the knees of the Mother of Consolation is Rachel." He quoted:

"'*Vox in Rama audita est, ploratus et ululatus: Rachel plorans filios suos: et noluit consolari, quia non sunt.*'"

"That's it!" Franky nodded, admitting candidly: "Though I always was a duffer at Latin, and we weren't taught at School to pronounce it—quite in that way."

Said the clear-eyed old man, whose dark wrinkled throat displayed no edge of linen above the plain circular collar of the soutane, only a significant border of purple from which two widish lappets of the same colour depended beneath the peaked and mobile chin, and who might have been a prelate of sorts, had it not been understood of simple Franky that the State had abolished the Catholic religion and banished all priests, monks, and nuns from France.

"The Italianate Latin puzzles you. . . . It is—slightly different to the Latin they taught you at Eton? *Hein?* When I lived in England—not so long ago—I counted several brave Eton fellows among my acquaintances. And their mental attitude with regard to the language of Virgil, Horace, and Tacitus was precisely that of Monsieur."

He chuckled, and his oddly young eyes twinkled quite gaily as he pulled out a battered little silver snuff-box and helped himself, wrinkling his thin hooked nose with evident enjoyment. As he dusted the pungent brown grains from his lappets with a coarse blue-checked cotton handkerchief, an amethyst ring on the wrinkled hand flashed pink and violet in the light.

"To Monsieur who is doubtless familiar with the Scrip-

tures in Tyndall's translation, I might suggest that the Latin of the Ancient Romans should be pronounced in the Roman style! But Monsieur will pardon this tone of the pedagogue. I will not 'bore you stiff' with a classical disquisition. Permit me to thank you for your amiable compliance with the request of an old man, and to wish you good-day."

He combined apology, farewell, and dismissal in a courtly little bow, and as though undoubting that the other would pass on, plunged again into the picture. But Franky lingered to say, awkwardly:

"Perhaps . . . If you don't mind. . . ."

"*Hein?* . . ."

The keen eyes reverted to his embarrassed face instantly.

"What if I do not mind? . . . There is something you desire to ask me?"

"Well, yes!" Franky admitted. "Don't quite pipe why, but I rather cotton to hearing your version. . . . Of the meaning of that picture, you know! . . ."

"Yes—yes! I understand! . . ." The vivid eyes flashed piercingly into Franky's, and leaped back to the great glorious canvas within the stately frame. "To you who were once a boy at Eton that woman who has no more tears to shed is Rachel of Rama. . . . To me, once Seminarist of the Institut Catholique, as to others of my holy faith and sacred calling—she is France—our beloved France, who leans upon the knees and against the bosom of the Catholic Church in her bereavement—mourning with anguish unutterable her children who are dead. . . . Dead to Faith, dead to the Spiritual Life—members separated from the Body of Christ by their own choice as by the act of Government. Lost!—unless the ray of Divine Grace find and touch them in their self-made darkness, and they repent, and turn themselves to Christ again!"

Franky said, with wholly lovable banality:

"Rather sweepin', but natural conclusion, from a religious point o' view. Still, when a whole nation gets up like one

man and bally well chucks a Religion, there must be something jolly off-colour and thundering rotten about that Religion, don't you know?"

"A whole nation!"

The bright eyes held Franky's sternly. He lifted his right arm, and the withered hand still shut upon the battered snuff-box shot up two fingers in vigorous protest. "Pardon, Monsieur—you are very seriously mistaken. France was never more Catholic at heart than now. How strange!—when but twenty-one miles of salt water divide Calais from Dover—when the Entente Cordiale has established between your country and mine nominally close and intimate relations; that so complete an ignorance as to the French Nation, its Government, its mode of thought, its moral, religious, and social conditions, should be found prevailing in Great Britain to-day!"

"My dear sir, you're off the bull—completely off!" protested Franky—Franky whose second sister was married to a Frenchman, Franky who knew Paris as well as the inside of his week-end suit-case, by Jove!

A deprecating shrug and a supple outstretched hand cut short the speaker.

"Pardon, Monsieur l'Anglais—I know what you would say to me! There is much force in the argument. . . . It is *très sensée*—and there is truth in it, and yet it is false—to be guilty of a paradox. The aristocracy of Great Britain, like her plutocracy, set high value upon much that comes from France. British gold is poured into my country in return for the newest and most fanciful modes in costume, millinery, and jewellery. And not only do your beautiful women adorn themselves with the inventions of our bold and original genius for ornament, but for your *menus*, your pleasures, the novels and plays that paint in intoxicating colours the joys of unchaste love and illicit passion, for the sensuous poetry that is garlanded with the flame-hued flowers of Evil, you are ready to praise and pay us lavishly,

as though no nobler growth than this rank luxuriance sprang from the intellectual soil of France. Our vices—alas!—with the appalling diseases that spring from them, and the combinations of drugs that alleviate these—all find with you a ready market. And you attend our race-meetings at Longchamps and Auteuil, where English jockeys ride French and Irish horses—and you believe, you!—that you know the social life of France. No!—but you are ignorant—profoundly ignorant! May GOD be thanked that you misjudge us thus cruelly. For if my country were no better than Great Britain and other foreign nations believe her to be, it were time indeed for a rain of fire from Heaven!"

Hardly raising his voice above a clear whisper, the emotion and vehemence with which he spoke, and the swift and fiery gesticulations with which he illustrated utterance, made the sweat start out in beads upon his wrinkled forehead and cheeks. He wiped these off with the blue checked handkerchief, saying:

"Pardon! I grow warm when I speak of these things. I recognise that if in the judgment of other nations France is a courtesan drunk with lechery, or at the best *un esprit follet*, she has brought this judgment upon herself. Flippancy, the desire to *faire de l'esprit* under any circumstances —the bold and brilliant gaiety that is her exclusive and most beautiful characteristic—these have caused her to be misunderstood. But whatever else she be, she is not Pagan nor Agnostic. To believe that is to wrong her cruelly, Monsieur!"

Franky, by now hopelessly at sea, endured the hailstorm of swift, vehement sentences with an expression of amiable vacuity, his stiffly pendent hands plainly yearning for the refuge of his trousers pockets, his mind rocking on the waves of the stranger's passionate eloquence like a toy yacht adrift on the bosom of the Atlantic. And the resonant Gallic voice went on:

## CHAPTER VIII

### MONSEIGNEUR

"The masters of France to-day are hostile to Christianity. They are Freemasons (Freemasonry in England is not Freemasonry as it is understood here); they are Freethinkers, Socialists, Internationalists, and Hedonists, the avowed enemies of the Catholic Faith. Hence, churches, seminaries, and schools have been closed by Government, communities of religious men and women have been uprooted and exiled. Priests have been banished, ecclesiastical and private property has been appropriated and confiscated, churches have been desecrated, the symbols of Christianity and religion everywhere torn down. In France upon Good Friday the standard of the Republic waves proudly, while the flag of every other Christian nation hangs at half-mast high. And yet—the great mass of the French people are—Catholic and nothing but Catholic! The light may be hidden, but the fire of devotion still burns in millions of faithful hearts gathered about the Church's altars, beating beside the hearths of innumerable homes in France. Blood—torrents of blood—would not quench that sacred fire. When the Day of Expiation comes, as it will come, most surely, the Catholicism of France will prove her salvation yet!"

With the final sentence, the hand that had been lifted in gesture dropped to the side of the speaker. The flashing glance took in Franky from the top of his sleek bewildered head to the tips of his beautiful patent-leathers. He said with a smile of irresistible amusement:

"Monsieur, I fear I have fatigued you. Let me thank you for your admirable patience. *Au revoir*, or if you prefer it—*Adieu!*"

Another of the quick little bows, and he had covered himself and passed on rapidly. Franky reflected, staring after the short black figure in the caped soutane with the worn purple sash and shabby beaver shovel-hat, as it receded from his view.

"Fruity old wordster, 'pon my natural! Toppin' fine talker! Wonder who he is? Head of a Public School, swottin' an address for the beginning of the Midsummer Half term—a Professor of Divinity gettin' up a lecture—the Archbishop of Paris rehearsin' a sermon. Whichever they call him, why don't he pitch his language at a man of his own size?"

And he went back to the Spitz through the boulevards that were surging with the afternoon life of Paris, and heard from Pauline that Miladi had retired to bed. She had already dispatched a billet of excuses to Sir Brayham, with whom Miladi and Milord were engaged to dine downstairs that evening, explaining that a headache prevented her from accompanying Milord. He—Milord—must be sure to make no noise in changing for dinner, as Miladi, after a crisis of the nerves of the most alarming, was now sleeping like an angel, having taken a *potion calmante* of orange-flower syrup with water, not the veronal so heartily detested of Milord. . . .

"Sleepin' like an angel, is she? . . . Good egg!—though I thought angels never went to bed—flew about singing all the giddy time. Righto, though! I won't disturb her ladyship. . . . When she wakes, give her my love. . . ."

And Franky entered his dressing-room on cautious tiptoe, lighted a cigarette, rang the bell for his valet, and began to reflect.

It was to have been a dinner of eight people—Brayham the host, with Lady Wathe, skinny little vitriol-tongued woman!—a man unknown who was to have sat next Margot; Commander Courtley—ripping good fellow old Courtley! no

better sailor walked the quarter-deck of a First-Class Cruiser —damn shame those Admiralty bigwigs denied such a fellow post-rank; and Lady Beauvayse, formerly Miss Sadie Sculpin of New York—pretty American with pots of boodle, married to that ghastly little bounder who'd stepped into the shoes a better man would be wearing if his elder brother (handsome fellow who married an actress, Lessie Lavigne of the Jollity—good old Jollity!) hadn't got pipped in that scrum with the Boers in 1900–1901.

Lessie, Lady Beauvayse, the widder called herself on the posters and programmes. Come down to second-rate parts in Music Hall Revue—gettin' elderly and stout. Must see red when she happened to spy the present Lord Beauvayse's pretty peeress in the stalls or boxes. . . . Wonder why the P.P. made such a pal of Patrine Saxham? Niece of Saxham of Harley Street—handsome as paint, proud as the devil, and an Advanced Thinker—according to Margot. Remembering the gift of the jade tree-frog, Franky involuntarily wrinkled his nose.

With Lady Beau and the Saxham girl, there would be a party of seven, counting the man unknown. . . . Might go on afterwards to the Folies Bergère or the Théâtre Marigny—or perhaps the Jardin de Paris. Why hadn't Jobling answered his master's bell? Why had he deputised a waiter to enquire whether his lordship wished his valet? Did he think waiters were paid to do his, Jobling's, work for him? Or did he, Jobling, suppose he was kept for show?

The strenuous stage-whisper in which Franky addressed the recalcitrant Jobling penetrated the door-panels of the adjoining bower, as such whispers usually do. But Margot was really sleeping—the orange-flower water had had a few drops of chloral mingled with it. Milord had never prohibited chloral, as Pauline had pointed out. But unsuspicious Franky, unfigging (as he termed the process), while the tardy Jobling prepared his master's bath and laid out

his master's "glad rags," plumed himself upon having made a notable advance in the science of wife-government. Even the blameless potion of orange-flower testified to his masculine strength of will.

## CHAPTER IX

### SIR THOMAS ENTERTAINS

You are invited to follow Franky, and sit with him at his friend Tom Brayham's circular board, decorated with great silver bowls of marvellous Rayon d'Or roses, that seemed to exhale the harvested sunshine of summer from their fiery golden hearts.

You remember the famous dining-room of the big Paris caravanserai, with its archways supported by slender pillars of creamy pink Carrara marble, wreathed with inlaid fillets of green malachite and lapis lazuli, and its electric illuminants concealed behind an oxidised silver frieze. And possibly you need no introduction to the deity—plain and middle-aged—in whose honour Brayham—the Hon. Sir Thomas Brayham, an ex-Justice of the King's Bench Division—in the remote mid-Victorian era a famous Q.C.—made oblation of luscious meats and special wines. The clever, sharp-tongued, penniless niece of a famous Minister for Foreign Affairs, she had made a love-match at twenty with Lord Watho Wathe, a handsome and equally impecunious subaltern in a famous Highland regiment, who was killed upon Active Service twenty years later, while travelling upon a special mission to the Front Headquarters during the South African War of 1900.

Two years later his widow conferred her hand upon Mr. Reuben Munts, of Kimberley and South Carfordshire, a diamond-mining magnate who had made his colossal pile before the War. She had never borne her second husband's name, and when he died, leaving her sole mistress of his millions, Lady Wathe resumed her place in Society, thenceforwards to sparkle as never before.

"The '*Chronique Scandaleuse*' in a diamond setting" some phrase-maker clever as herself had aptly termed her. Without her riches, stripped of her wonderful diamonds, Society might have found her to be merely a little chattering woman, avid of the reputation of a humorist and *raconteuse*, unflagging in her relish for stories, not seldom of the broadest, related at her own expense or at the cost of other people, and over-liberally garnished with nods and becks, darting glances, and wreathed smiles.

Upon this night of the Grand Prix—won, you will remember, by Baron M. de Rothschild's "Sardanapole"—the little lady's jests fizzled and coruscated like Japanese fireworks. Her gibes buzzed and stung like wasps about a lawn-set tea-table, when new-made jam and fragrant honey tempt the yellow-and-black marauders to the board. And yet from the soup to the *entremets*, Franky listened in dour and smileless silence, unable to conjure up a grin at the sharpest of the Goblin's witticisms, or swell the guffaw that invariably followed the naughtiest of her *double-entendres*.

"Off colour, what? . . ." his crony Courtley queried in a sympathetic undertone, catching a glimpse of Franky's cheerless countenance behind the bare, convulsed back and snowy heaving shoulders of Lady Beauvayse, who occupied the intervening chair.

"Putridly off colour. . . . Walked in the Bois, and got a touch of the sun, I fancy!" Franky whispered back too loudly, drawing upon himself the Goblin's *equivoque:*

"The sun or the daughter, did you say, Lord Norwater? Dear me!" the Goblin shrilled; "you're actually blushing! You've revived a long-lost Early Victorian art."

'Was blushing really an art with the ladies of that dim and distant era?" asked the friendly Brayham, not in the least comprehending Franky's discomfiture, yet desirous of diverting the Goblin's glittering scrutiny from her victim's scarlet face.

"It was the art that concealed Heart—or assumed it!"

Lady Wathe retorted, with a peal of elfish laughter, turning her tight-skinned, large-eyed, wide-mouthed ugliness upon the speaker, and nodding her little round head until the huge and perfectly matched diamonds of the triple-rayed tiara that crowned her scanty henna-dyed tresses flashed blinding sparks of violet and red and emerald splendour in the mellow-toned radiance of the electric lights.

The Goblin had meant nothing, Franky assured himself, as the angry blood stopped humming in his ears, and his complexion regained its normal shade. The bad pun that had bowled him over had possibly been uttered without malicious intent. . . . Yet Lady Wathe rented a gorgeous suite upon the floor below the Norwater apartments, and one of her three lady's-maids might have been pumping Pauline. . . . What was she saying? . . . Why was everybody cackling? . . .

The Goblin was launched upon a characteristic story. Its *dénouement*—worked up with skill and related with point—evoked peal upon peal of laughter from the guests at Brayham's table, with the sole exception of Franky, whom the anecdote found sulky and left glum. He said to himself that if Lady Beauvayse, *née* Miss Sadie J. Sculpin of New York, sole child and heiress of a Yankee who had made millions out of Chewing Gum, chose to forget her position as the wife of a British Peer, and mother of his children, by Jove! and scream at such nastiness, it was her look-out. If the big red-blond man who sat on Franky's right shook with amusement, as he recapitulated the chief points of the story for the benefit of the girl who sat next him, it was his affair. But that the Saxham, an unmarried girl, who oughtn't to see the bearings of such a tale, should openly revel in its saltness, made Franky feel sick—on this particular night.

He realised that he detested the Saxham girl, one of Margot's chosen Club intimates, more fervently than even Tota Stannus or Joan Delabrand; more thoroughly than Rhona Helvellyn; only little less heartily than he hated

Cynthia Charterhouse. Big, bold, galumphing, provocative—in fact, so much IT that you couldn't overlook her—he found her more unpleasantly attractive than usual, in a bodice that was no more than a fold of shimmering orange stuff above the waist—tossing the *panache* of ospreys that startlingly crowned her, offering up her *persistant* illusion perfumes for the delectation of the appreciative male.

Only look at her, ready to climb into her neighbour s pocket. Leaning her round white elbows on the guipure table-cloth, half-shutting those long greeny-brown Egyptian eyes of her, wreathing her long thick white neck to send a daring challenge into the face of the laughing man. A big man, bright red-haired, blue-eyed, and broad-chested, showing every shining tooth in his handsome grinning head. . . .

"She's *screaming*, isn't she, dear Lady Beau?" Thus the Saxham to her employer, friend, and ally, across the silver bowls of Rayon d'Or roses, her naked shoulder brushing the coat-sleeve of her neighbour, the big rufous man. And Lady Beau gushed back:

"In marvellous form to-night. . . . Don't you think so, Count? Do agree with us!" and the big man agreed, with the accent of the German Fatherland:

"She is *kolossal*. . . . *Wunderlich!* . . ."

"Who's the German next me—big beggar Lady Beau and Miss Saxham are gushing over?" Franky presently telegraphed to Courtley behind the charming American's accommodating back. And Courtley signalled in reply:

"Von Herrnung. German Count of sorts—Engineer and Flieger officer. Son of an Imperial Councillor, and cousin to Princess Willy of Kiekower Oestern—really rather an interestin' beast in his way. Made a one-stop flight to Paris from Hanover in April, with an Albatros biplane. Previously won an event in the Prinz Heinrich Circuit Competition." He added: "We can't decently blink their progress in military aviation. It's one o' them there fax which the brass-hats at the War Office pretend

to regard as all my eye. Yet they know the Fatherland—or if they don't they oughter! Good-lookin' chap this. Not over thirty, I should guess him. Always dodging in and out of the German Embassy. The Goblin frightful nuts on him. . . . Goin' to steer him through the next London Season—suppose he's lookin' out for a moneyed wife!"

"Hope he gets her!" Franky mentally commented. But he looked with new interest at his big blond German neighbour, mentally calculating that with all that bone, brawn, and muscle, von Herrnung couldn't tip the scale at less than sixteen stone.

Small-boned himself and of stature not above the medium, Franky appreciated height and size in other men. And von Herrnung was undeniably a son of Anak. The noiseless, demure waiters who paused beside his chair to refill his glass or offer him dishes were dwarfed by his seated presence to the proportions of little boys.

Once, when there was a momentary bustle at the principal entrance to the now crowded restaurant, and a party of men, ceremoniously ushered by M. Spitz in person, passed up the central gangway between the rows of glittering tables, shielded by glass-panelled screens framed in oxidised silver, and crowded now with gossiping, laughing, gobbling patrons—men and women of varied nationalities, representing the *élite* of the fashionable world, von Herrnung rose and remained imperturbably standing at the salute, his eyes set and fixed, his head turned rigidly towards the personage, semi-bald, stout, with a prominent underjaw and a hard official stare rendered glassier by a frameless square monocle, and showing beneath the open front of a loose military mantle a star upon the left side of his evening dress-coat, and the glitter of an Order suspended from a yellow riband about his thick bull-neck.

"The German Ambassador, Baron von Giesnau," Lady Wathe returned to a question from Lady Beauvayse, as the

portly official figure creaked by, leaving a whiff of choice cigars and a taint of *parfum très persistant*, lifting three fingers of a white-gloved hand in acknowledgment of his countryman's salute, and von Herrnung unstiffened and dropped back into his chair. "No! . . . I'm not sure where the Emperor is. . . ." She added, with one of her laughs and a shrug of her thin vivacious shoulders: "Ask Count von Herrnung—he's sure to know!"

"*Gnädige Gräfin*," von Herrnung returned when interrogated, "I am not able to answer your question." He shrugged his broad shoulders and showed his white teeth. "*Unser Kaiser* is—who shall say where? At the Hof . . . possibly at Homburg. . . . Stop! . . . Now I remember! *Seine Majestät* is at Kiel. . . ." He continued, arranging with a big white hand displaying a preposterously long thumb-nail a corner of his glittering, tightly rolled moustache: "At Kiel . . . *ach*, yes! he has been there since the 25th of June. Entertaining the British and American Ambassadors, visiting the Commander-in-Chief of your British Squadron, superintending the armament of one of our own new battle-cruisers,—seeing put into her those great big Krupp guns that are to sink your super-Dreadnoughts by-and-by!"

The deliberately-uttered words of the last sentence dropped into a little pool of chilly silence. He had spoken with perfect gravity, and the Englishmen who heard him stared before they grinned. Then the women shrieked in ecstasies of amusement—the Goblin's laugh overtopping all.

"For he hates us! . . . You can't think how he hates us! . . ." she crowed, writhing her lean little throat, clasped by seven rows of shimmering stones, wagging her Kobold's head, crowned by its diadem of multi-coloured fire. "Tell us how you hate us, Tido! . . . Do—pray do!"

"I hate you, *ach* yes! . . . All German officers are like

that—particularly the officers of our Field Flying Service," gravely corroborated von Herrnung. "We have many pleasant acquaintanceships with men and women of British nationality, but your race—the Anglo-Saxon branch of the great Teutonic oak-tree, it is natural that we should hate! For that Germany must expand upon the west and northwest as well as south and east, or suffocate, is certain. She must wield the trident of Sea Power; she must transform the map of Europe. She must exploit and disseminate German trade and German Kultur; therefore, as the British, more than any other nation, stands in the way of German development, we look forward to the Day when we shall exterminate you and take our right position as masters of the world!"

The women screamed anew at this. The men were now laughing in good earnest. Franky found it impossible to restrain the convulsions that shook him in his chair. Purple-faced Brayham tried to speak, but broke down wheezing and spluttering. The Goblin shrilled:

"Tell them, Tido. . . . Please tell them! . . . Do —ha! ha! tell them how you're spoiling for a scrimmage with us! Show them your thumb-nail, pray do!"

Thus adjured, the big German solemnly extended his left hand for general inspection. The pointed, carefully-manicured thumb-nail was at least two inches long. Its owner said with perfect gravity:

"This is the badge of a Society of England-haters, chiefly Prussian military officers, young men of noble birth, bound by an oath of blood. This mark we carry to distinguish us. It is a sign of our dedication, to remind us of the purpose for which we are set apart." He added: "Count Zeppelin himself set the fashion of the uncut thumb-nail. It will be cut when the Day comes, and it has been dipped in blood!"

"In blood—how beastly!" said the Saxham girl, curling the corners of her wide red mouth contemptuously. "What a horrid crowd your noble young Prussian officers must be! And when is the dipping to come off?" Her voice was deep

and resonant as a masculine baritone, and of so carrying a quality that Franky started as though the words had been spoken at his ear.

"*Gnädige Fräulein*," von Herrnung answered, "I have already told you. When the Day comes for which we are preparing. When the great German nation shall abandon Christianity—cast off the rusty fetters of Morality and Virtue—call on the Ancient God of Battles—and beat out the iron sceptre of World Power with sword-blows upon the anvil of War."

"When we're all to be exterminated, he means!" Lady Wathe gasped behind her filmy handkerchief. "Tido, you're too absolutely screaming! Do say why your noble young Prussians keep us waiting? . . ." And von Herrnung answered composedly:

"Because we are not yet ready. We shall not be perfectly ready before the spring of 1916."

His hard, bright glance encountered Franky's, and he lifted his full glass of champagne and drank to him, smiling pleasantly.

Of course the German was rotting, reflected Franky. If he wasn't, the combined insolence and brutality of such a menace, uttered at the table of one of the Britons in whose gore von Herrnung and his comrades yearned to dip their preposterous two-inch thumb-nails, took the bun, by the Great Brass Hat! He was perfectly cool, as his muscular white hands—for the dinner had arrived at the dessert stage—manipulated the silver knife that peeled a blood-red nectarine. What a splendid ring, a black-and-white pearl, large as a starling's egg, and set in platinum, the fellow sported on the little finger of that clawed left hand. What was he asking, in the suave voice with the guttural Teutonic accent?

"You were in the Bois, I believe, Lord Norwater, early in the midday. Did you see any *avions* of the *Service Aëronautique?* Did the invention they were testing come

up to expectations? . . . Did the English aërial stabiliser answer well? . . ."

Franky knew, as he encountered the compelling stare of the hard blue eyes, that he objected to their owner. He returned, in a tone more huffy and less dignified than he would have liked it to be:

"Can't say. . . . I was merely walking in the Bois with a lady. Wasn't on the ground as—an investigator of the professional sort."

"*So!*" Von Herrnung's face was set in a smile of easy amiability. The shot might have missed the bull for anything that was betrayed there. "And the name of the inventor? It has escaped my memory. Possibly you could tell me, eh?"

"Certainly," said Franky, planting one with pleasure. "He happens to be a cousin of mine. Would you like me to write down his address?"

"*Gewiss*—thanks so very much. But I will not trouble you!"

Nobody had heard the verbal encounter. Lady Wathe was holding the table with another anecdote punctuated with staccato peals of laughter, tinkling like the brazen bells of a beaten tambourine. Mademoiselle Nou-Nou, a Paris celebrity, belonging to the most ancient if not the most venerable of professions, had promenaded under the chestnuts at Longchamps that morning, attired, as to the upper portion of her body, in a sheath of spotted black gauze veiling, unlined—save with her own charms. And a witty Paris journalist had said that "the costume was designed to represent Eve, not before nor after, but behind the fall"; and Paillette, who was there, working up her "Modes" letter for *Le Style*, had answered——

Everybody at table was leaning forward and listening, as the Goblin quoted the *riposte* of Paillette.

Von Herrnung, showing his big white teeth in a smile, chose another nectarine from the piled-up dish before him,

seeming to admire the contrast between his own muscular white fingers and the glowing fruit they held. But Franky saw that he was angry as he neatly peeled the fruit, split the odorous yellow flesh, tore the stone out crimson and dripping like a little human heart, and swallowed both halves of the fruit in rapid succession, dabbing his mouth with the fine serviette held up before him in both hands. Then, with an air of arrogant self-confidence peculiar to him, he said loudly, addressing the whole company:

"Madame Paillette certainly deserves the Croix d'Honneur for so excellent a *bon-mot*. As for Mademoiselle Nou-Nou, I do not myself admire her, but my brother Ludwig, when he was alive, paid intermittent tribute to her charms." He added: "He was killed in the charge by a fall with his horse in the Autumn Manœuvres of last year, while the Emperor was being entertained by command at a shooting-party upon a forest property of my father's that is about fifty kilometres from Berlin."

## CHAPTER X

### A SUPERMAN

"Do tell what the Kaiser said when he heard of the accident!" came in the voice of Lady Beauvayse, pitched now in a high, nasal tone that was a danger-signal to those who knew her, like the mischievous twinkle in her beautiful eyes. "I guess he must have been real upset!"

"*Ja, ja, gewiss,*" returned von Herrnung, slightly shrugging his broad, square shoulders. "Of course the Emperor was greatly grieved for my father's loss. But naturally the programme had to be carried out. There is another day's Imperial shooting; the business is concluded—very satisfactorily—and *Seine Majestät* takes leave. . . . . But of course he sent to my mother a sympathetic message, which greatly consoled her. And his Chief Equerry, Baron von Wildenberg, represented him at my brother's funeral. And shortly afterwards he graciously conferred upon my father the Second Class of the Order *Pour le Mérite.*"

"How nice! But what for?" demanded the downright American, with astonishment so genuine that Brayham strangled with suppressed chuckles, and the bearded mouth of Commander Courtley assumed the curve of a sly smile.

"What for?" exclaimed von Herrnung. He stiffened his big body arrogantly, reddening with evident annoyance, and thickly through his carefully-accentuated English the Teutonic consonants and gutturals began to crop. "*Gnädige Gräfin,* because that so coveted decoration is the reward of special service rendered to the Emperor. And my father in his-personal-sorrow-conquering that it upon the amusements of Imperial Majesty-might-not-intrude—had the

noblest devotion and courage exhibited—in the opinion of the All-Highest."

"My land!" exclaimed Lady Beauvayse, stimulated by the undisguised enjoyment of Brayham, Courtley, and Franky, "if that don't take the team and waggon, with the yella dog underneath it, an' the hoss-fly sittin' on the near-wheel mule's left ear!" She added: "No wonder your Kaiser thinks himself the hub of this little old universe—being nourished from infancy on flapdoodle of that kind." She added, dropping the saw-edged artificial accent, and reverting to the agreeable, drawling tones familiar to her friends: "But, last fall, when King George and Queen Mary were allowing to spend the day with us at Foltlebarre Abbey, and see the Gobelins tapestries after Teniers that were restored by our great American dye-specialist, Charlotte B. Pendrill of New York—and I had a dud head with neuralgitis, and couldn't have bobbed a curtsey without screaming like peacocks before a wet spell—Lord Beauvayse just sent a respectful note of excuse over by fast car to the place in our county where their Majesties were spending a week-end, and got a kind, cosy little line by return, making an appointment for a more convenient day."

"*Es mag wohl sein*," said von Herrnung stiffly, repeating an apparently favourite phrase. "It may be so—in Great Britain. But in Germany the trivial happenings of ordinary existence are not permitted to interfere with the Imperial plans."

"Mustn't spoil Great Cæsar's shoot by letting a natural sorrow dim your eye, in case you're unexpectedly informed of a family bereavement," said Brayham to Lady Beauvayse. "So now you know what to expect in case the Kaiser should take it into his head to pop in on you at Foltlebarre somewhere about July."

"I surmise I'd expect a visitor of mine, whether he's the Kaiser, the King, or the President," retorted Lady Beauvayse, "to be a gentleman!" Her beautiful eyes blazed

with genuine ire as she gave back von Herrnung's dominating stare. She continued, reverting more purposefully than ever to the exaggerated New York accent, mingling cutting Yankee humour with bitter irony in the sentences that twanged, one after another, off her sharp American tongue: "And I guess, Count von Herrnung—though between your father and Amos J. Sculpin of Madison Avenue, New York, and Sculpin Towers, Schenectady, there's considerable of a social gulf—if your Emperor had been a house-guest of my parpa's, and my elder brother"—she lifted an exquisite shoulder significantly ceilingwards—"had happened to get the hoist—parpa'd just have said: 'Your Imperial Majesty, I am unexpectedly one boy short, and far from feeling hunkey. My cars are waiting at my door to convey you right-away to your hotel. Look in on us after the interment, when Mrs. Sculpin has had time to get accustomed to her mourning. And as my *chef* had orders to serve a special dinner in honour of your Majesty, I shall be gratified by your taking the hull menoo along—outside instead of in!'"

The Goblin cackled. Ecstatic Brayham shrieked:

"Magnificent, by Gad! He ought to know your father!" Franky and Courtley yielded unrestrainedly to mirth, as did the Saxham girl. While her teeth, dazzling as those of a Newfoundland pup, gleamed in her wide red mouth, and her long eyes glittered between their narrowed eyelids, von Herrnung gave her a quick sidelong glance of anger. She caught the look, and suddenly ceased to laugh, as the young Newfoundland might have stopped barking. She said below her breath:

"Vexed? . . . Why, you're really! . . . And Lady Beau wasn't joking about your brother. . . . She wouldn't dream of such a thing! . . . . She's tremendously kind and sympathetic. Was he—your brother—nice? . . ."

"Most women thought so."

"Would I have thought so? What was he like?" the girl persisted.

Von Herrnung turned in his chair so as to face her, answering:

"You see him now, with one difference. He was as black as I am red."

The blue eyes of the man and the long agate-coloured eyes of the young woman encountered. She said slowly in her warm, deep voice, less like a feminine contralto than the masculine baritone:

"I like—red men—best!"

"So! Then it was lucky that, instead of me, my brother Ludwig died!" said von Herrnung, so loudly that Lady Wathe's quick ear caught the final words. She shrilled out her laugh:

"But you're a wretch, Tido!" She shrugged her thin vivacious shoulders under their glittering burden. "A heartless wretch!"

"Of course I was regretting my brother, yes!" said von Herrnung. "But I do not pretend that his death did not improve what you English would call my worldly prospects. That is the cant of Christianity—particularly the sentimental Christianity of England. One world is not enough for your greed of possession. You must eat your cake here and hereafter. But for the robust super-humanity of Germany, this world is both Hell and Heaven. It is Hell for the man who is stupid, weakly, poor, and conscience-ridden. It is Heaven for the man who has knowledge, power, health, wealth, the craft to keep his riches, and the capacity to enjoy to the fullest the pleasures they can procure him, with the courage to free himself from the bonds of what Christians and Agnostics term Morality, and live precisely as Nature prompts. So when my brother fell in the charge," continued von Herrnung, with perfect seriousness, "he opened for me the gates of Heaven. Since then I am a god!"

"A mortal god," called out the chuckling Brayham; "for you've got to die, you know, when your number's up."

"When the time comes, of course I shall die," acquiesced von Herrnung, "in the vulgar sense of the word. But not so those who come after. Our bacteriologists will have discovered the microbe of old age and its antitoxin, and then we shall die no more."

"Dashed if I know the difference between the vulgar way of dying and the other style!" Brayham snorted apoplectically, feeling in his waistcoat-pocket for the box of digestive tabloids that showed in a bulge. "Dashed unpleasant certainty—however you look at it! And a man who weighs eighteen stone at fifty has *got* to look at it, every time his tailor lets out his waistcoats, and his valet asks him to order more collars because the last lot have shrunk in the wash."

"Ah, yes, to die is a hellish bore!" agreed von Herrnung, contemplating his obese and purple host with a cruel smile. "But I and my friends have no Hell, and we have done away with the myth of Heaven. To dissolve and be reabsorbed into the elements—that is the only after-life that is possible for a Superman."

"You'd hardly call it Life, would you?" came unwillingly from Franky. For von Herrnung's eyes seemed to challenge his own.

"'*Imperial Cæsar, dead and turned to clay*,' what?" quoted Courtley, to whom von Herrnung transferred his smiling regard.

"I venture to hope that my clay may serve a more patriotic purpose than stopping a draught-hole," said the German, carefully fingering the tight roll of glittering red hair upon his upper-lip. "It may be baked into a sparking-plug for the aëro-motor of one of our Zeppelin dirigibles—the mysterious Z. X., for instance, in whose trial trip from Stettin across the Baltic to Upsala in Sweden you were so keenly interested some months ago. Or some of my body's chemical constituents may pass into the young tree beneath which my ashes will be deposited. If beech or spruce, then I may furnish ribs or struts for an Aviatik or a Taube. But

the best way of continuing to exist after one is dead is to leave plenty of vigorous sons behind one. To perpetuate the race"—he continued speaking to Lord Norwater, who had flushed and moved restlessly—"that is the high and noble obligation Duty imposes upon the German Superman."

"You'll have to hurry up your matrimonial arrangements, Tido," interposed the Goblin, with her cackle, "if your family is to tot up to a respectable number before the year 1916."

"You mean that I may get killed in our great War of Extermination? That is possible," agreed von Herrnung. "Our Flying Service is not a profession conducive to long life. Many of our keenest officers remain unmarried for that reason. The Emperor would prefer each of us to marry, or at least adopt a son. For myself, I would like to steal one of your splendid British boys and rear him up as a true German——"

Something sharp and keen and burning stabbed through Franky's brain to his vitals. It would have been a relief to have insulted von Herrnung. He set his teeth, fighting with the desire, as the guttural voice went on:

"I would teach him to hate you. . . ." The speaker sucked in his breath as though he relished the idea exceedingly. "You cannot think how he would hate you!—my German-British Superman."

"By-the-by, the literary genius of Dreadnought type who invented the Superman," began Courtley, who had been peaceably nibbling salted pistachios, "can't pronounce his name for ginger-nuts, but it sounds something like a sneeze——"

Von Herrnung said stiffly:

"You doubtless speak of our great Nietzsche, whose triumphant thought has crushed all other mental systems."

"Quite so. Must be the chap!" said Courtley. "That is, if he died a lunatic. . . . But possibly I'm mixing

him up with some other philosopher of the crushing kind?"

"No, no. It is true," corroborated von Herrnung. "The brain of Nietzsche gave way under the terriffic strain of incessant creation. How should it be otherwise?" He became ponderous, even solemn, when he descanted upon the literary idol of Modern Germany. "How should it indeed be otherwise?" he demanded. "And was it not the fitting crown of such a career—the appropriate end to such a life-work?—to evolve the Superman—and die!"

"Quite so, quite so!" Courtley agreed. He smoothed his well-trimmed beard with his broad hand, and his eyes assumed a meditative expression. "Rather tantalising—always hearing about Germany's Supermen and never seeing any. What sort of chaps are they? I'm really keen to know."

"You have not to go far," returned von Herrnung. His fine florid complexion had suffered a deteriorating change. Savage anger boiled in his blood. He had thrown the iron gauntlet of German military preparedness in the faces of these cool, well-bred, smiling English, and brandished the iron thunderbolt of German intellectual supremacy—and with this result—that they took his deadly earnestness as jest. "*Kreutzdonnerwetter!* these English officers. . . . The pig-dogs! the sheep's heads! . . ." He swallowed down the abusive epithets he would have liked to pitch at them, and stiffened his huge frame arrogantly as he stared in Courtley's simple face:

"*Aber*—you have not far to go, to visualise the type conceived by Nietzsche. I and my comrades—*we* are Supermen!"

"Thanks for explaining, frightfully!" said Courtley with artless gratitude, as Brayham purpled apoplectically and even the Goblin tittered behind her fan. "Shall know what to ticket you now, you know. Thanks very much!"

"You have read Nietzsche?" the sailor's victim queried.

Said Courtley, with his best air of frank simplicity:

"His works were recommended to me by my doctor, when I had a bad attack of insomnia, about a year ago. Ordered a volume of 'Thus Spake Zara Somebody.' Half a chapter did the business. No insomnia since then. Sleep like a mite in a Gorgonzola, the instant my head touches the pillow—never read another word. But heaps of friends in the Fleet'll be wanting to borrow the book presently, depend on it. For we'll all be too scared of Germany to sleep—in the year 1916."

Laughter broke forth. Lady Wathe gasped, dabbing her tearful eyes with a lace-bordered handkerchief:

"Oh, Tido! will you dead-in-earnest Germans never learn what pulling a leg means?"

"*Ach ja!* I should have understood!" He had stared, frowned, and reddened savagely. Now, with a palpable effort, his equanimity was regained. He turned with a smiling remark to Patrine Saxham, as Lady Beauvayse breathed in Courtley's ear:

"You perfect pet! How I love you for that!"

"Man simply suffering for a set-down. Good egg, you!" murmured Franky in the other ear of the Commander.

"Felt sorry for him. Had to do something—common humanity!" rejoined Courtley, eating more and more pistachios. "Seems as over-crammed with their *Kultur* as a pet garden-titmouse with coco-nut. Vain too, but that's the fault of the women. Lord! how they gush at those big, good-looking blighters. See the Saxham!—ready to climb into his waistcoat-pocket and stop there. Would, too, if she wasn't built on Dreadnought lines herself."

She was laughing into von Herrnung's smiling visage as he offered her a light from his cigar. For with the arrival of coffee and liqueurs, the fragrance of choice Havana and Turkish had begun to mingle with the tang of Mocha, the heady bouquet of choice wines, and the odours of fruit and flowers. The screens of frosted glass were rearranged,—

the ladies had produced their cigarette-cases,—of gold with the monogram of the Goblin set in diamonds; of platinum adorned with turquoises and pearls wrought into the Beauvayse initial and coronet; and of humbler tortoiseshell, bearing in fanciful golden letters the name "Patrine"——

"Patrine . . ."

"The Saxham girl" had taken the tortoiseshell cigarette-case from the front of her low-cut, sleeveless bodice. Von Herrnung had leaned towards her, boldly exploring with his eyes the bosom where the trinket had been hiding, and read the golden letters. He smiled as he met her puzzled eyes, saying:

"'Patrine' is your name. . . . Now I know it I will not forget it! Tell me!"—he spoke in lowered tones—"why do you carry your cigarette-case just in that place?"

She laughed, half-shutting her long eyes and slightly lifting her big white shoulders. "Simply for convenience—when I'm in evening kit. Dressmakers don't allow us poor women pockets in these days."

"It may be so!" As von Herrnung spoke with a calculated roughness that he had found useful in dealing with many women, he took the cigarette-case from her, momentarily covering her hand with his own. As his curving fingers touched her palm, he felt the soft warm flesh wince at the contact. Her black brows drew together, her sleepy agate eyes shot him a hostile sidewise glance.

"I have not offended?" he whispered in some anxiety. And she answered in a louder tone, under cover of the talk, and laughter of the others:

"No! . . . Only—I hate to be touched, that's all."

He smiled under the crisp tight roll of his red moustache, and his large, well-cut nostrils dilated and quivered.

"One day you will not hate it. I will wait for that day. But—about your cigarette-case—you do not now tell me the truth! . . . The real reason is more subtle. You carry

that thing there—under your corsage—to make live men envious of an object that cannot feel!"

"Really! . . . What a lot you must know about women!"

The words were mocking, but the voice that uttered them was big, warm, and velvety. Far above the ordinary stature of womanhood—you remember that Franky regarded her as a great galumphing creature—her head would yet have been much below the level of von Herrnung's, but for the height of the extraordinary diadem or turban that crowned her masses of dull cloudy-black hair. Folds of vivid emerald-green satin rose above a wide band of theatrical gilt tinsel, set with blazing stage rubies, and above the centre of the wearer's low, wide brow a fan-shaped *panache* of clipped white ospreys sprang, boldly challenging the eye. Thrown with royal prodigality upon the back of the chair she occupied was an opera-mantle of cotton-backed emerald-green velvet lavishly furred with ermine and sables that were palpably false as the garish gold and jewels of the diadem that crowned her, yet became her big, bold, rather brazen beauty as well as though the Siberian weasel and the Arctic marten had been trapped and slain to deck and adorn her, instead of the white rabbit of ordinary commerce and the domestic pussy-cat.

## CHAPTER XI

### PATRINE SAXHAM

Who was the girl—the woman rather—who diffused around her so powerful a magnetic aura, whom prodigal Nature had dowered with such opulence of bodily splendour, that cheap, tawdry clothes and ornaments borrowed from her a magnificence that conjured up visions of the Salammbo of Flaubert, gleaming moon-like through her gold and purple tissues—of Anatole France's Queen of Sheba treading the lapis-lazuli and sardonyx pavements of King Solomon's palace in her jewelled sandals of gilded serpent-skin, darting fiery provocations from under the shadow of her painted lashes towards the Wise One rising from his cushions of purple byssus, between the golden lions of his ivory throne?

What a voice the creature had! thought von Herrnung. Soft and velvety like that dead-white skin of hers. The tortoiseshell case he held in his big palm still glowed with the rich vital warmth of her. His blood tingled and raced in his veins; his hard, brilliant stare grew languorous, and his mouth relaxed into sensuousness. He said almost stupidly, so keen was his enjoyment:

"You English ladies smoke a great deal, I think."

"Why should we leave all the pleasant vices to the men?"

She asked the queer question, not defiantly, but bluntly. Her strange eyes laughed a little, as she saw Franky wince. "Lord Norwater hates me. Well, that's about the limit!" she told herself. "And I helped on his love-affair for little Margot's sake!" "I beg your pardon, Lord Norwater! You were saying something? . . ."

"You're an Advanced Thinker, aren't you, Miss Saxham? At least, my wife tells me so," Franky began. "Well, I'm not! But I've got my doubts as to whether vice is pleasant, for one thing—and for another, whether the general run of women in these days aren't quite as vicious as the men?"

"He wants to be nasty. . . . Poor boy, what have I done to him?" passed through the brain topped by the bizarre diadem. But before its wearer could reply, von Herrnung interposed:

"Naturally they are vicious—if they desire to please men. A dash of vice—that is the last touch to perfect an exquisite woman. It is the chilli in the *mayonnaise*, the garlic and citron in the *ragoût*, the perfume of the carnation, the patch of rouge that lends brilliance to the eye, the bite in the kiss! . . ."

"The bite in the . . . Great Snipe! what an expression!" thought Franky, whose attack of propriety had reached the acute stage. Patrine Saxham repeated slowly, and with brows that frowned a little:

"'*The bite in the kiss*'. . . ."

"You pretend not to understand . . ." said the guttural voice of von Herrnung, speaking so that his wine-and cigar-scented breath stirred the heavy hair that hid her small white ear. "But you are wiser than you would have me believe. Are you not? Tell me!—am I not right?"

He bent closer, and she broke a web that seemed in the last few moments to have been spun about her, invisible, delicate, strong, making captive the body and the mind. Her odd agate-coloured eyes laughed into his jeeringly. Her wide red mouth curved and split like a ripe pomegranate, showing the sharp white teeth that, backed by a vigorous appetite and seconded by a splendid digestion, had done justice to every course of Brayham's choice *menu*.

Men always waxed sentimental or enterprising towards the close of a rattling good dinner. Patrine didn't care, not

a merry little hang! They might say and look what they liked, as long as they kept their hands off. At a touch, the quick revulsion came.

"You are amused. . . . I understand. . . ." Von Herrnung spoke between his teeth, in a tone of stifled anger. "Always to rot; it is your English fashion. . . . When you encourage a man to make love to you, you are rotting. When you say sweet things to him—possibly you are rotting too?"

She turned her face away from him, striving to control her irresistible laughter. In vain; it took her as a sudden gale takes a pennant at the masthead—seized and shook her—as von Herrnung could have shaken her had they been alone. He turned savagely from her; she heard him speak to Brayham, who responded with what-whattings, his fleshy hand to his deafest ear. Von Herrnung repeated his utterance. Brayham goggled in astonishment. Courtley murmured to Franky:

"Hear what the blighter's saying. . . . No keeping him down, is there? . . . Buoyant as one of his own Zeppelins!"

They looked and listened. Brayham's thick bull-neck was shortening as his shoulders climbed to his mottled ears. They caught a sound between a snort and a bellow. Then Lady Wathe's diamonds flashed all the colours of the rainbow as she turned vivaciously to her friend. . . . Count Tido wanted to propose a toast, the custom in dear, sentimental Germany. . . . Why shouldn't he? Rather amusing. She begged him to go on. Said von Herrnung:

"To-night the laugh goes much against me. I have been most frightfully rotted. Now, in my country it is the custom when a guest has been made game of that those who have laughed at him must drink a toast with him—to show there is no ill-will."

"Never heard of such a custom—and I've lived in Germany a good deal."

This from Brayham. The German persisted:

"Still, it is a custom, and it may be you will gratify me?" He went on, now addressing the company generally: "Here at the Spitz they have a Tokayer that is very old and very excellent. If I might order some? It would be amusing if you would all join me in drinking to The Day! . . ."

The speaker, without waiting consent, beckoned to one of the attendants. Brayham, his cockatoo-crest of stiff grey hair erect, stared, as at a new and surprising type of the human kind.

But the words Brayham might have uttered were taken out of his mouth. A swift glance had passed between the English Naval officer and the rather stupid, titled young Guardsman occupying the seat left of von Herrnung. And while the Commander coolly intimated to the advancing waiter by a sign that his services were not needed, Lord Norwater, lobster-red and rather flurried, turned to von Herrnung and said, not loudly, yet clearly enough to be heard by every guest at the table:

"Stop! Sorry to swipe in, Count, but you'd better not order that wine, I think!"

"You think not?" asked von Herrnung, with coolest insolence.

"I—don't think so. I'm dead-sure!" said Franky, getting redder. "We Britons laugh at brag and bluffing, and the gassy patriotism shown by some foreigners we're apt to call bad form. We abuse our Institutions and rag our Governments—we've done that since the year One—far as I can make out. And when other people do it we generally sit tight and smile. We've no use for heroics. But when the pinch comes—it ain't so much that we're loyal. We're Loyalty. We're IT!"

With all his boggling he was so much in earnest, and with all his earnestness so absurdly, quaintly slangy, that the listeners, men and women of British race, whose blood warmed to something in his face and utterance, were forced

to struggle to restrain their mirth. Some inkling of this increased the speaker's confusion. He cast a drowning glance at his bulwark Courtley, and Courtley's eye signalled back to his, "Good egg! . . . Drive on, old son!"

"You're a foreigner here, of course . . ." Franky pursued before the German could interrupt him. He appeared oblivious to his own analogous case. Perhaps for the moment the Hotel Spitz in the Place Vendôme, Paris, and its gorgeous namesake in the London West End, were confused in his not too intellectual mind. He went on: "We're ready to make allowances—too rottenly ready sometimes. . . . But I read off the iddy-umpties to Full Stop, a minute back. . . . Count von Herrnung, when you ask English ladies and Englishmen—two of 'em in the Service—to drink that toast with you—you must know you're putting your foot in your hat!"

"Especially," said Courtley, as Franky collapsed, dewy all over and wondering where his breath had gone to—"especially as—a friend of mine happens to have heard that toast proposed rather recently during a Staff banquet at a military headquarters in Germany. And the words are—not—quite exactly flavoured to suit the British taste."

"'*To the Day of Supremacy. On the Land and on the Sea, under the Sea and in the Air, Germany Victorious for ever and ever!*'" said von Herrnung, who had got upon his legs, and loomed gigantic over the lace-covered, flower-decked table, now in the after-dinner stage of untidiness, with its silver-gilt and crystal dishes of choice fruit and glittering bonbons disarranged and ravaged, its plates littered, its half-emptied wine-goblets pushed aside to make room for fragrant, steaming coffee-cups in filigree holders, and tiny jewel-hued glasses of Maraschino Cusenier, and Père Kermann. There was a rustle, and a general scraping-back of chairs. Courtley had also risen, and Lord Norwater. A susurration of excitement had passed through the long, lofty, brilliant dining-room. People were getting up from

the tables—the pink-and-yellow sheets of *Paris Soir*, the late edition of the *Daily Mail*, and another of the *Liberté*, were fluttering from hand to hand. . . . And the shrill voice of Lady Wathe was heard.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE GATHERING OF THE STORM

"Sit down, Tido!" said Lady Wathe. "What is the matter with everybody? What are they talking about? Tell a waiter to get us a paper! What do you say, Sir Thomas? Of course! Stupid of me to forget. To-day was to be the official summing-up of the evidence in the Perdroux Murder Case. A French Jury won't guillotine a woman—you said they wouldn't, Sir Thomas, from the beginning. But of course the verdict's 'Guilty' for Madame! . . ."

Brayham, with a King's Bench cough, admitted that he had few misgivings as to the ultimate upshot. Upon the waiter's return without a newspaper, affirming a copy not to be procurable, judicial inquiries elicited from the man that the general *furore* for news was less due to popular interest in the famous *cause célèbre* than to popular thirst for details with reference to the Assassinations at Serajevo. Which brought from Lady Wathe the shrill query:

"Sarajevo—where's Sarajevo? Ask him about the Verdict—I simply must know!"

The Verdict had been "Not Guilty," according to the waiter. . . . The Goblin screamed:

"But she is!—she is! Good heavens, my dear Sir Thomas! Isn't it murder to riddle an editor to death in his own office, before his subordinates, with bullets from a revolver you've hidden in your muff?"

Brayham summoned up his best King's Bench manner to answer:

"If he dies—and a jury don't happen to decide that you're innocent—the evidence is against you, my dear ma'am!"

Lady Wathe's vivacious gestures provoked astounding coruscations from her panoply of jewels. She had been certain from the first that there would be no capital sentence. But "Not Guilty." . . . Surely it should have been Mazas for life. Or New Caledonia—didn't they send murderesses to New Caledonia?

Brayham, with a tone and manner even more deeply tinged with the King's Bench, begged leave to correct—arah!—his very dear friend's impression that the blameless and much-tried lady, now probably—aha—arah!—supping in the company of her husband and her advocate in her own luxurious dining-room, might, without libel, be called a murderess. Like—aha!—many other highly-strung women, Madame Perdroux had had recourse to the revolver as the *ultima ratio*. But the Verdict pronounced by the President of the Paris Court of Assize that afternoon had—arah!—purged——

"Bother the Verdict!" snapped the Goblin.

Brayham, incensed at this irreverence, replied with acrimony. The pair wrangled as Paris had wrangled since March 16th, while the great, crowded restaurant buzzed with the name of an obscure town in Eastern Europe—"*Sarajevo, Sarajevo*"—tossed and bandied from mouth to mouth.

We have learned to our bitter cost the appalling significance of this crime of Sarajevo, which had dwarfed in the estimation of the keen-witted Parisians the most sensational *cause célèbre* ever tried before a French Criminal Court.

The Perdroux trial and its probable result had split Paris into hostile factions. The Press had attacked or defended, lauded or vilified the chief personages of the drama with tireless energy for weeks. The Verdict of "Not Guilty" would have caused fierce rioting upon the boulevards this sultry night of July. Blood would have been spilt between the partisans of Madame Perdroux and her opponents, but for this unexpected bolt from the blue.

Berlin had had the story of the assassinations with its breakfast-rolls and hot creamed coffee. Now, in the blue-white glare of the great electric arc-lamps of the Paris boulevards, men and women leaned over one another's shoulders to get a whiff of the big black letters on the displayed contents-bills; at every kiosk and bookstall the newspaper-vendors were sold out; much-thumbed copies of the papers were bought by knowing speculators, to be sold and bought and sold again.

The Kaiser at Kiel was racing his own clipper when the operator of the Imperial private wireless read a story from the notes of the singing spark that smote him pale and sick. When his anointed master heard the gory news, his chief regret seems to have concerned the untimely decease of the partner of his "life-work." "It will have," he said with bitterness, "to be begun all over again!"

One wonders, in the blood-red light of four years of dreadful carnage, seeing Hell and its dark Powers still unchained, and raging on this War-torn earth of ours—what would have been the nature of the edifice reared by these two Imperial craftsmen, had the younger not been removed by a violent and sudden death?

Did the prospect of unlocking—with one touch on an electric button and the scrawl of a wet pen—the brazen gates of Death and Terror ever strike cold to the heart of the rufous Hapsburg Archduke? Madness, we know, is in the blood of his evil-fated House. But, when the shots from a Bosnian High School student's revolver pierced Franz Ferdinand's brain and body, was he sane enough to realise that the crime of the Anarchist had saved his own name from foul, indelible, and hideous infamy? We shall know when the trumpet of the Archangel sounds the Last Réveillé, and the grave gives up its dead, and the Sea spews forth its victims, and the secrets of that deeper abyss, the human heart, are revealed in the sheer, awful Light that streams from the Throne of God.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE SUPERMAN

People had for some time been rising, passing out through the oxidised silver-framed glass doors of Spitz's big brilliant dining-room; beyond these the vestibule was now full to the walls, so that its palms and tree-ferns rocked amidst the billows of a heaving human sea. Many guests lingered in conversation, standing in groups near the vacated tables. The glitter and blaze of jewels, adorning bizarre coiffures, bare and powdered throats, bosoms, arms, and backs,—the dazzling display of brilliantly-hued toilettes, made an *ensemble* marvellously gay. And now, returning as they had arrived, but unattended by M. Spitz, came the party of notables from the German Embassy, talking together in loud, harsh, Teutonic accents. Von Herrnung, erect, stiffening to the salute as previously, remained in the rigid attitude until the Ambassador had passed. But this time the official finger beckoned. He turned, pushed back his chair, and in a stride, joined the squat, elderly figure. The yellow-white, heavily-featured face with its stiff brush of white hair above the square brain-box turned to him, the deeply-pouched, shrewd grey eyes looked past *him* to the table he had left. The coarse mouth under the white moustache with the brushed-up points, uttered a few emphatic words. Then, with a slight nod, the representative of the All Highest at Berlin passed on. The swing-doors opened and shut behind him and his following. And von Herrnung rejoined his party, saying with a queer, excited breathlessness:

"The ladies will pardon. . . . His Excellency had something to say!"

The ladies were rising, looking for their theatre-wraps. He deftly lifted the barbaric garment of green velvet and sable-edged ermines from the back of Miss Saxham's chair, and, opening it, held it to receive her tall, luxuriant person, mentally commenting:

"With such hips, such a bosom, and such shoulders, the jade must be twenty-eight or nine." And remembering how boldly she had said to him that she liked red men, he thought: "Amusement here. . . . Nothing needed but time and opportunity—which this Bosnian affair reduces to a minimum." "*Gnädiges Fräulein* will you not put on your *mantel?*"

She told him that she was too hot. He insisted, with all the Teuton's dread of chill:

"But it will be cooler in the vestibule, and cooler still when we are driving. Do we not go on to a theatre? I think Lady Wathe has told me so?"

She shrugged her splendid shoulders.

"Nothing so proper. The *Jardin des Milles Plaisirs*, on the Champs Elysées. We're all dead nuts on seeing the new dance from São Paulo. The thing that has exploded Tango and Maxixe, you know. Look!—the others are moving. Don't let's lose them! No! I won't take your arm. Please carry my wrap with your coat."

"I will put my coat on. Then I shall better carry your *mantel.*"

An attendant deftly hung von Herrnung's thin black, sleeveless garment over his broad shoulders, and gave him his white silk wrap and soft crush felt. He slipped a coin into the man's palm, its small value being instantly reflected in the features of the receiver, and moved towards the swing-doors with Patrine. She said, as a slight block momentarily arrested their progress:

"What are they all jabbering about? Who has been assassinated? What has happened at this place with the crackjaw name? . . ."

"Sarajevo . . ." came in von Herrnung's guttural accent.

"Sarajevo. . . . Not that I know where it is," said the deep warm voice, that was more like a young man's baritone than a young woman's contralto. And von Herrnung answered, with a renewal of that tingling thrill:

"Sarajevo is the capital of Bosnia in Eastern Europe. When Austria annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1909, she made her seat of Government at Sarajevo. The Slavs grumbled. They wished for union with Servia—that little nation of pig-breeders! . . . They themselves—the Bosnians—are stupid peasants, *dümmer Teufels!—Schafskopfs!* They cultivate their land with the wooden ploughs that were used at the date of the Trojan War. . . . But this does not interest you at all, I think?"

"How do you know it doesn't interest me?"

"Because dress and jewellery and amusement are the chief things in your life, *gnädiges Fräulein.* You are not even interested in *der Politik,* or in the higher *Kultur.* The social progress of your own country is nothing to you. You are too——"

"Too frightfully stupid. . . . Thanks!"

"I did not say too stupid," von Herrnung contradicted. "But if you were stupid, you are too hellishly handsome for that to matter in the least."

To be called hellishly handsome pleased her. Her eyes gave him a flashing side-glance. As a surge in the crowd pressed her curving hip against his tall, muscular body, she took his offered arm with a rough, brusque grace. They were near the swing-doors when she spoke:

"Tell me about the Sarajevo business. . . . Who is the official swell the Trojan ploughmen have hoisted—as Lady Beau would say?"

"I will tell you. It has happened only this morning ——"

She felt the man's powerful muscles thrill and become

rigid with suppressed excitement under the hand that rested on his arm.

"Two personages of the highest rank have been horribly assassinated. The Archduke Franz Ferdinand, *Kronprinz* of the Imperial House of Austria, and his wife; you have heard of the *Gräfin* Sophie Chotek, created Duchess of Hohenberg? Virtually she was *Erzherzogin*—Archduchess—but the wife of the Archduke by a *mariage de la main gauche*. A morganatic marriage—such unions have been heard of in your virtuous England."

They had passed the swing-doors now, and mingled with the crush in the vestibule. Patrine said, signalling with a pair of long black suède gloves and a vanity-bag of gilded metal chain-mail:

"There's Lady Beau. Behind the second column right of the entrance. And here's Captain Courtley coming to hurry us up!"

Courtley, smiling and unruffled as ever, dodged under the huge roseate elbow of an immense lady in Oriental kincob tissues. He gave his message, turned and dived back again. The rich, womanly baritone of Miss Saxham said, addressing von Herrnung:

"Lady Wathe and Sir Thomas Brayham have gone on in Lady Wathe's auto-brougham. Lord Norwater has done a bunk. Pretended he had an appointment; he's been frightfully fed up with all of us this evening. Lady Beauvayse says her chauffeur is on the string all right, but about a million cars are ahead of him. Why did your Austrian Archduke and his wife go to that place in Bosnia if it wasn't healthy for Royalties? Fancy!—they went to their deaths this Sunday morning! Why does one always forget it's Sunday in Paris?"

"That English Sunday of yours," exclaimed von Herrnung, "is very good to forget, I think!"

She gave her deep, soft laugh. He went on rapidly:

"Of the Archduke and the Duchess I tell you, since you

have asked me. . . . They inspected the troops—regiments of the Austrian garrison. Then they drove in their automobile along the Appel Quay, towards the Sarajevo Town Hall. They are passing beneath the shade of an avenue of tamarind and oak trees when a bomb is thrown at them by a man hidden among the branches. . . . The Archduke is very prompt—he wards off the bomb with his arm. He is not then hurt, nor is the Duchess. But his *Adjutant*—in the car behind them—is wounded in the neck. When they arrive at the Town Hall the Mayor commences the address of welcome. To him Franz Ferdinand says angrily: '*Halt den Mund!* . . . Shut up, you silly fellow! What the big devil is the use of your speeches? I came to Sarajevo on a visit, and I get bombs thrown at me. . . : It is too damned rotten for anything! . . ."

"Yes, yes! . . . Go on!" She bit her lips, fighting a nervous impulse to laugh.

"So the Imperial *cortège* drove away, and a student threw at the Archduke another bomb. It did not explode, so he shot him with an automatic revolver, an American Browning. The Duchess tried to cover him with her body, and the assassin shot her also. The Archduke begged her to live for their children, but both victims died as they were being taken to the Governor's house. . . . They have arrested the assassins, he who tried to kill, and the fellow who succeeded. . . . They are both young, and men of Serb race. They are rebels all—they hate their Austrian rulers. Sarajevo is swarming with fellows of the same breed. . . ."

"What will the Austrian Government do to them, now they've caught them?"

"To the regicides," von Herrnung returned harshly, "Austria will do—nothing that very much matters. It is not an important thing to destroy two trapped rats. But I think there will be an ultimatum from Vienna to the Servian Government; and if the terms of that are not complied with,

then the Emperor of Austria may give the signal for his monitors upon the Donau to open fire upon the capital of Belgrade."

Patrine asked negligently, as a new surge of the crowd thrust her tall, lithe figure away from her companion's, forcing her to tighten her hold upon his arm:

"'Monitors?' . . . I used to think monitors were big schoolboys and schoolgirls. Senior pupils told off to keep order. I was one myself once. . . . Chosen because I was bigger, and noisier, and naughtier than any other girl in my class. . . ."

"Ha, ha, ha! . . . *Prächtig!* . . . That is capital!" She could feel the laughter shaking his big ribs. "That is just what they are—those monitors of the Donau. Each is a big girl who keeps order *von anderen Sorte.* But they have turned-up noses, not Egyptian and beautiful like yours!"

He added, with the calculated roughness that had previously pleased her:

"You shall now put on your *mantel.* For the car, I see, is open." He shrugged his broad square shoulders closer into his overcoat and pulled up the collar about his throat, saying ill-temperedly: "Always does one find it with the English. It is *lächerlich*—that passion for the air."

"Lovely, did you say? . . ."

Ignorant or careless that he had said "ridiculous," Patrine suffered him to wrap her mock ermines about her, seeing above the frieze of waiting figures that filled in the lower part of the picture framed by the portico, the emerald-green bird-of-Paradise plume of Lady Beauvayse whisk into the big white Rolls-Royce, past the neat black-haired head of Courtley, and the peaked cap and pale Cockney profile of Morris, the chauffeur. She threw back a jest as she passed out:

"I'm glad you think it lovely. It's one of the nicest things about us—that we're keen on soap and water and can't do without lots of fresh air."

She was in the car before his outstretched hand could touch her. He followed, letting Courtley precede him because he wished to sit opposite, and the great Rolls-Royce purred out of the jam beneath the illuminated glass archway, and in a moment was out of the Place Vendôme and moving with the stream of vehicles down the Avenue of the Champs Elysées. In the mingling of moonlight and electric light the tawdry paste jewels of Patrine's preposterous diadem rivalled the costly splendours of the jewelled fillets adorning Lady Beauvayse's coiffure, her *panache* of white osprey flared above her broad, dark brows as insolently as though they crowned a Nitocris or a Cleopatra. But—and here was a titillating discovery—the strange face with its broad brows, wide, generously-curving cheeks, and little rounded chin, did not belong to a woman of thirty, or even twenty-five. She was much younger than the German, who plumed himself upon his *flair* for the accurate dating of women, had at first credited. It would be amusing—he told himself again—hellishly amusing, to cultivate this curious hybrid, half hoyden, half *femme-du-monde*.

Sarajevo—still Sarajevo. You caught echoes of the crime of that morning in the tongues of twenty nationalities upon the Paris boulevards that night. People in automobiles and open carriages, people in the little red and blue flagged taxis, people crowding the auto-buses and Cook's big open brakes, the army of people on foot, endlessly streaming east and west along the great splendid thoroughfares, tossed the name of the Bosnian capital backwards and forwards, as though it had been a blood-stained ball.

A gay masculine voice called from a knot of chatterers standing near the wide illuminated archway of electric stars and crowns and flowers under which streamed a variegated crowd of pleasure-seekers as the big Rolls-Royce deposited its load:

"*Nom d'un chien!* What a pack of assassins these Serbians! . . . And yet—what if the whole show were got

up by Rotanian at Berlin? His bosom friend, you say—the big Franz Ferdinand? *Jud*? what of that? Sometimes one finds inconvenient the continued existence of even a bosom friend."

## CHAPTER XIV

### A PARIS DANCE-GARDEN

By "Rataplan" was meant the Kaiser, Patrine comprehended, as her companion glanced over his shoulder at the candid speaker, muttering something that sounded like a German oath. But Lady Beauvayse was twittering through a filmy screen of verd-blue chiffon, now discreetly enveloping her lovely Romney head:

"We're going to hunt up Lady Wathe and Sir Thomas. Take care of Miss Saxham, Count von Herrnung, in case we get separated in the crush. . . . Don't forget our programme, Pat. A whiff of Café Concert . . . Colette Colin is billed to sing some of her old songs and the very newest of the new ones. . . . Then we're coming to the Pavillon de la Danse to see the São Paulo sensation. . . . La Rivadavia and Herculano, and all the rest of the crowd. . . . Meet you there. . . . So long! Mind, you're not to get lost!"

"In London you often hear La Colette," said von Herrnung, as he paid the lean-jawed functionary in the gold-laced light-blue uniform—the usual notice of free entry having vanished from the entrance—and passed with his companion into the gravelled promenade of the open-air concert-hall. "But to-night you will hear no songs of old France, no Chansons Pompadour nor Chansons Crinoline. She comes to this place from her own theatre to oblige an old comrade. There is Nou-Nou in that box with some smart women and the Turk who wears our Prussian Order of the Red Eagle with the Star and Crescent of the Medjidie. He is Youssouf Pasha, the Sultan's Envoy-Extraordinary. Nou-Nou has brought him to hear La Colette. Shall we not sit here?"

"Who is Nou-Nou?" Patrine asked, as she settled her tall, luxuriant person on one of the little green-painted iron chairs.

"Who is Nou-Nou?" her companion echoed. "You saw her to-day at Longchamps in her black confection. Everybody was looking. . . . She is wonderfully *chic*—Nou-Nou! May I be permitted to light a *zigarre?* . . ."

"Do! . . . But—why is she so much the rage? She isn't even pretty, your Mademoiselle Nou-Nou." Patrine said it with her bright gaze fastened on the famous Impropriety who had paraded under the chestnuts of Longchamps in the sheath of black gauze unlined, save with her own notorious attractions—both irresistible and fatal, judging by their recorded effects upon excitable Parisian *viveurs* and *gommeux*. She saw a triangular and oddly-crumpled face, rouged high upon the cheek-bones in circular patches, a pair of almost extinguished eyes, indicated by streaks of blue pencil, and caught a sentence screamed at the stout Turk in a voice like a hoarse cockatoo's. Boldly erect upon the skull adorned by a scanty thatch of lemon-yellow balanced a black feather, long and attenuated as the wearer. Nou-Nou's stick-like, fleshless arms, the cadaverous and meagre torso unblushingly revealed by the transparent casing of her upper person, might have enthralled a keen student of anatomy. But of feminine charms, in the accepted sense of the word, she possessed not one, it seemed to Patrine.

"Do not look at her too hard, or she may send round and invite you to supper," warned the laughing voice of von Herrnung speaking close to her ear. "She has all the vices—the good Nou-Nou!"

"Including the vice of indiscriminate hospitality," Patrine laughed; but a little uncontrollable shudder rippled over her as she withdrew her eyes from the painted, crumpled visage, leering with half-extinguished eyes from under the canary-coloured wig.

"That is so. Tell me—you and Lady Beauvayse seem great friends—quite inseparable. . . ." He leaned nearer, his bold eyes closely scrutinising her face. "How comes it that she leaves you alone in a Paris dance-garden: with me, whom you have met to-night—for the first time?"

"She knows I can take jolly good care of myself, wherever and with whomsoever I may happen to be!" Her black brows frowned; it was evident she resented his criticism. "And—what are you getting at? What's the matter with poor old Paris? You know—perhaps it sounds odd!—but I've never been in Paris before. . . . And I love it! Down to the ground—it suits me! It's so gay and brightly-coloured and pagan. The public buildings and parks are dreams; the shops—too entrancing for anything! And this place, with its jabber and music and stagy illuminations, trellises where real roses mix up with artificial ones—ornamental beds of geraniums and calceolarias and thingumbobs bordered with smelly little oil lamps, gilt band-stands, concerts, and lovely trees in blossom. . . . Is it so luridly awful? To me, it's rather sweet! Of course the dancing—everybody knows the dancing is pretty well the limit. But one has seen such a lot of Tango in London—the bloom will be pretty well rubbed off!"

"Yet some lingers. You have still something to learn from Herculano and La Rivadavia! . . ."

"Do I strike you as such a perfect daisy of inexperience?" Something in his tone stung, for the full white cheeks coloured faintly. "You didn't talk to me at dinner as though I were one!"

"How could I help that?" he asked, with the roughness that had previously intrigued her. "Am I to blame that you look like Phryne or Aspasia when you are only Mademoiselle de Maupin—before she set out upon her travels? For you have only got as far as Paris with your friend Lady Beauvayse. Why does she bring you? I am curious to know."

"Because I am her paid secretary and amanuensis." Patrine brought the words out with a rush; it was clear that she thought the candour a necessity, but hated it. "She can't get on without one, and her husband, Lord Beauvayse—awful little bounder!—won't stand her having a man. Don't great ladies have secretaries in Germany? Can't you see me doing Lady Beau's correspondence in my fearful fist—enclosing cheques to people who solicit donations for charities with a committee and Hon. Treasurer—tearing up the begging letters full of howlers in the spelling-line—smelling of bad tobacco and beer or gin? Then I have to keep her posted in her engagements, go to shows, and functions, and kettledrums with her when she hasn't a pal handy—that's where my share of the fun comes in. Just as I'm visiting Paris, as I dare say I shall visit other centres of lively iniquity—in the character of the sheep-dog that doesn't bow-wow at the wrong man!"

"You should bow-wow at me." His teeth were hidden, but his eyes were crinkled up with soundless laughter. "For I am a very wrong—a very wicked man!"

"How sad!" Her brows were still frowning, but her wide red mouth was beginning to curl up at the corners. "Couldn't you reform? Is it too late?"

"I hope so!" he answered her. "For if I were good I should possess no attraction for a woman of your type. And to charm you I would give my soul—if I had a soul!"

"Great Scott! You're candid. . . . Modest too. . . . And complimentary!"

"I am candid, because I cannot help myself."

Three comedians had come upon the stage. She told him not to talk to her. She wanted to see the turn; she liked music-hall stuff. He obeyed, mentally congratulating himself on having ascertained her social status, something better than a typist, hardly on the same level with his sister Gusta's *dame de compagnie*.

While his bold eyes read the book of her provoking beauty,

the performance on the stage, backed by the deep green palmate foliage and white or ruddy candelabra-like blossom-sprays of the chestnuts, framed by a broad band of electric lamp-flowers, was culminating to its final gag. A preposterously fat man attired in the historic low-crowned hat, Union Jack waistcoat, brass-buttoned blue tail-coat, leathers and hunting-tops of the traditional John Bull, another comedian in the legendary costume of M. Jacques Prud'homme, and a truculent-looking personage whose Teutonic French accent, spiked silver helmet with the Prussian eagle, First Imperial Guards cuirass and tunic, breeches and spurred jack-boots, in combination with a well-known moustache with upright ends, a huge Iron Cross, and a great many other property decorations, left no doubt as to the political bent of the scrap of pantomime.

It was an ordinary bit of comic knockabout, to which the tragic circumstances of the day lent a peculiar tang. One has seen it before, played by the three comedians, in the green-baize aprons, brown duffel knee-breeches, and shirt-sleeves sported by the waiters of low-class Paris or Munich brasseries.

In the centre of the stage, instead of a bright-hooped beer-barrel on a wooden cellar-stand, was a revolving globe representing the World. And each of the three comedians, being armed with a tumbler, a spile-awl, and a spigot-tap, proceeded, with appropriate patter, gesture, and grimaces, to insert his spigot, draw, and drink. John Bull turned the globe to the United Kingdom, and tapped the big black patch in East Middlesex. Creamy-headed London porter filled his glass. He held it up, nodded a "Here's to you!" and toped off. M. Prud'homme punctured France in the rich vine-growing district of Epernay. Champagne crowned the goblet, and he drank in dumb show to Gallia, the land of love, laughter, and wine. It was then the turn of the Teuton. He bored, and Brandenburg yielded a tall bock of foaming blonde lager. He sucked it down with guttural *Achs* of delight.

But this was not all. John Bull exploited the East Indies. A stream of rubies and emeralds filled his glass. He bored deep in the Union of South Africa—diamonds and gold-dust heaped the vessel. Fired by his success, M. Prud'homme inserted his spigot into wealthy Bordeaux, whipped it out, applied his lips, and drank deep. He corked the oozing spot and tapped Algerian Africa. Coffee rewarded him, fragrant and richly black. He next exploited Pondicherry, Chandernagore on the Hooghly, French Equatorial Africa, and New Caledonia. Nothing came. He tried Cochin China, and drew off a glass of yellow tea at boiling-point. Encouraged to drink the strange beverage by the appreciative pantomime of his British neighbour, he swallowed it, with results of a Rabelaisian nature, at which everybody laughed heartily, including Patrine.

It was now the turn of the Teuton. He drew German beer from Togoland, Cameroon; German South-West and South-East Africa yielded an indifferent brand of the beverage. German New Guinea in the Pacific, the Solomon, Caroline, and other islands, with Asian Kiao-Chao, merely wetted the bottom of the glass with a pale fluid, German beer by courtesy. "*Sapperlot! Der Teufel! Kreuzdonnerwetter!*" He tasted, spat, stamped, and sputtered forth strange expletives, M. Prud'homme's terror at these unearthly utterances being provocative of more humour of the Rabelaisian kind. Then he decided to try again, excited to envy by the spectacle of the stout Briton drawing gold from Australia, gold from Canada, gold from New Zealand and the West Indies, and gold from Ceylon, gold from the Crown Colonies in China, gold from the Gold Coast, gold from Rhodesia and Nigeria, gold from everywhere; filling the capacious pockets of his blue brass-buttoned coat, of his tight breeches, of his nankeen waistcoat, until he bulked enormously, a Bull of Gargantuan size.

Such wealth roused respect in Prud'homme, who esteems the yellow metal. He embraced the Briton, heartily con-

gratulating him. This roused the Teuton's ire. He seized the spigot and once more plunged it into Germany, Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony—each of the States yielding beer, beer, BEER. He went on, tapping, filling, and guzzling. . . . Twelve full tumblers and he had begun to swell most horribly. Fifteen—and his rotundity equalled that of John Bull. But one State remained untapped. He swilled down the twenty-fourth bock, drawn out of Lübeck—plunged the spigot into the Reichsland—once Alsace-Lorraine——

And the big glass crimsoned with a sudden spurt of blood.

It was over in an instant, the comedians had skipped nimbly from the scene, the globe had developed a pair of very thin human legs and followed them off at a proscenium-wing, before many of those who had witnessed, clearly understood. Only the men and women of Gallic race among the cosmopolitan, polyglot audience answered with a deep, inward thrill to the ruby gush that told how the blood of France still ran red in the throbbing arteries of the beloved, reft, alienated province, in spite of her forty-five years of separation, in defiance of the loathed laws, customs, language, service, all the gyves rivetted on her by the Teuton, her conqueror. Now round after round of applause signified their comprehension. But the comedians did not answer the call.

Von Herrnung, who had worn the same contemptuous smile for every phase of the clumsy by-play, relaxed his stiff features. A stout tenor from the Opera appeared and sang a Spring song by Tchaikovsky, following it with the exquisite Serenade of Rimsky Korsakov, "Sleep, Sad Friend."

The tenor was recalled. Colette Colin succeeded him. She sang "*Notre Petite Compagnon*" and "*La Buveuse d'Absinthe*" to the accompaniment of a pale, lean, red-nosed man with a profile grotesque as ever adorned a comic poster; who touched the piano-keys as though they were made of butter; and had a way of sucking in his steep upper-lip and

cocking his eye at the star as he waited on her famous efforts, that made Patrine shake with suppressed laughter on her green iron chair.

The last ironic line of Rollinat's ballad, marvellously uttered rather than sung, died out upon a stillness. A storm of approval broke. Men and women stood up applauding in their places, and the singer came back, to sigh out the bitter-sweet lyric of Jammes, "*Le Parle de Dieu.*" Then, while her name still tossed on the surges of human emotion, backwards and forwards under the electrics, Colette Colin, the pet of Paris, the eclipser of the famous Thérésa, was gone. Something of the yearning anguish of Jammes, who sees Religion as a dusty collection of ancient myths and folk-tales; to whom Faith is mere superstition, but who would give his all to be able to pray once more as in childhood, had given the girl lumps in the throat as she listened to Colette Colin. Though, unlike the sad, Agnostic poet, Patrine had no tender, sentimental memories in connection with a mother's knee.

Not from Mildred Saxham had she learned her first childish prayer, but from a procession of nurses; beginning with "Now I Lay Me Down" and "Gentle Jesus," instilled by Hannah, a Church of England woman, continuing with the Lord's Prayer, insisted on by Susan, a Presbyterian; culmininating in the "Our Father" "learned the childer" by Norah the Irish Catholic, a petition which—minus the final line—was just the same as the Lord's Prayer. Also the Creed in English, and a surreptitious "Hail Mary" which brought about the sudden exit of Norah from the domestic scene.

For teaching Patrine and Irma about God and Heaven and all that, was sufficiently interfering, said Mrs. Saxham, but when it came to Popery, *rank Popery*, it was time the woman went. So Norah ceased to be, from the point of view of the little Saxhams—and He who had risen above the horizon of childish intelligence, a Being vaguely realised as

all-powerful and awful, great and beneficent, stern and tender, sank and vanished at the same time.

But the Idea of Him remained to be merged in the personality of the child Patrine's dada. Dada, so handsome and jolly, and nearly always kind to his rough little romping Pat. The boy, Patrine's senior by sixteen months, had died in infancy. Captain Saxham was always gloomy on the deceased David's birthday. Mildred reserved a nervous headache of the worst for the anniversary, the kind that is accompanied by temper and tears.

She was indifferent to Patrine, who resembled the Saxhams. But she was devoted to Irma, her own image bodily and mentally. Thus nothing interfered with Patrine's adoration of her father. The handsome, genial, ex-officer of cavalry was his daughter's god, until Mildred tore away the veil of Deity, broke the shrine and cast down the idol, one day when Patrine was fourteen years old.

The girl learned that Captain Saxham's noisy fun and alternating fits of rage were due to over-indulgence in brandy-and-soda. That he gambled away Mildred's income over cards and Turf speculations, as he had wasted the sum of money for which his Commission had been sold. That he was "not even faithful"—that he spent week-ends "at hotels with fast women"; that he was not worthy the sacrifice Mildred had made for him.

Had she not for his sake jilted his younger brother, Owen! Even on the verge of their marriage; the presents received; the house taken and furnished; the trousseau ready, everything perfect to the last pin in the wedding veil. Nobody could resist David when he chose to woo, but why, why had Mildred yielded? So fierce a sense of shame awakened in the daughter as she listened, that it seemed to her as though her face and body scorched in the embrace of an actual, material flame.

"How could he? . . . How could you? . . . Betray

Uncle Owen. . . . One of you was as low-down as the other, to play a beastly, sneaking game like that!"

"You insult your mother and father. Leave the room!" commanded Mildred. And Patrine left it, vigorously slamming the door.

Captain Saxham, who had sold out of the Army when Patrine and Irma were respectively seven and six years old, never knew what he had lost in the esteem of his elder daughter. She loved him still, but he had ceased to be her god. They lived at Croybourn and occupied three sittings at one of its several Anglican Churches. The Vicar, a strenuous man, whipped in Patrine and Irma for Confirmation classes. They studied the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Athanasian Creed, and dipped once more into the Protestant Church Catechism, first instilled at the certified High School for the Daughters of Gentlemen—an establishment they attended as day-pupils, and were to leave, without passing the Oxford Secondary, in the following year when Captain Saxham died.

For David, that cheerful, easy-going Hedonist, dropped off the perch quite suddenly, in the smoking-room of his London Club. In life he had been of the easy-going type of Christian, who avoids open scandal, and hopes to die at peace with the clergyman.

An attack of cerebral effusion had anticipated the clergyman. Mildred and Irma wept bitterly, Patrine sat dry-eyed. Even in the face of the new tombstone at Woking Cemetery, testifying to the many virtues of David, as soldier, husband, and father, her stiff eyelids remained unmoistened by a tear. At the base of the scrolled Cymric Cross ran a text in leaded letters:

"BLESSED ARE THE DEAD WHO DIE IN THE LORD."

The undertaker had recommended the text to the widow because it contained the right number of letters required to fit in at the bottom. But did it fit in, Patrine had some-

times wondered, quite so appropriately, at the close of her father's life?

She treasured his portrait, taken at the age of thirty, the tinted presentment of a handsome, stupid young officer, resplendent in the gold and blue and scarlet of a crack Dragoon regiment. It had fallen to her keeping when her mother had re-married. But she cherished no illusions regarding the original. How often, since her own eyes had been opened to the fact of their existence, had she not screened David's vices from strangers' eyes.

She had made him her ideal, and Mildred had revealed him to her as vicious, unprincipled. She could not forgive her mother for telling her those horrors, she, Mildred—seemed to forget whenever she was pleased. But Patrine had never forgotten. She would wake at night even now with the dry sobs shaking her. . . . To have been able to believe in that dead father as noble, chivalrous, good, would have been so sweet; she had shed big surreptitious tears in sympathy with the anguish of Jammes, who would have so loved to believe in the existence of Almighty God, and the dear little Jesus, the Blessed Virgin, and the holy Angels, because Faith is so restful, *si paisible*. . . .

## CHAPTER XV

### THE BITE IN THE KISS

But von Herrnung was saying, as they moved with a straggling procession of similar pleasure-seekers, over smooth sanded pathways between beds of geranium and verbena and lobelia, ivy-leaved geranium and gaily coloured foliage-plants, bordered with little twinkling lamps:

"Shall I tell you what I have just heard as those people passed us? The tall man with the white moustache, and the chic little woman in the Spanish *mantilla*. She told her friend that we make a handsome couple. Perhaps that makes you a little angry? . . . Shall I make you still more angry? Well then, listen? . . . If we were really a couple you would not have that so-black hair. . . ."

"Why not?" He had roused her curiosity. She put away the little damp, laced handkerchief. "Would your cruel usage of me have turned it white?"

"Not that, but you would have added the one touch that makes perfection. You are too sombre—too much like a night in October with all that cloudy blackness. . . . You would have bleached and dyed your hair—not yellow, nor yet orange—nor even flame. . . . The colour of beech-leaves in winter, as one sees them burning against a snow-bank. And—all the women would be crazy with jealousy—and all the men would be dying at your feet! For you would be Isis then—you would be the Sphinx-woman of whom La Forgue wrote and Colette has sung to us. You would be hellishly, divinely beautiful!"

"Hellish again." She gave her low, deep laugh, prolonging it a trifle stagily. "What do you bet me I don't—do what you said?"

"Bleach and dye . . .?"

"That's it." She nodded. "To the colour of—what was it? 'Beech-leaves in winter.' . . ."

"Against a snow-bank." He added: "The snow is your wonderful skin. And I will bet you four hundred and twenty marks—that is twenty pounds English. Is it agreed? . . . Do you not say—Done? . . ."

"Twenty pounds. . . ." She shrugged her big white shoulders. "My dear man, I haven't got twenty pounds in this blessed old world!"

He hesitated; finally said with reluctance:

"I will lend you twenty pounds—it will cost you twenty pounds to have your hair done here in Paris. . . . But you will be *sehr schön*—the money will be well spent. No? . . ."—for she had shaken her head, frowning. "It is offered—why will you not accept?"

"Because I won't. . . . There are some things I draw the line at. Borrowing money's one of them."

"Then I will bet you my magpie pearl—you may have seen it"—he displayed the ornamented little finger—"against that not-very-good diamond you wear on your left hand."

She burst out laughing and repeated through her laughter:

"'Not very good.' I call that insulting. . . . When it cost me fifteen francs in the Palais Royal. Well, done with you!"

"It is done! But you have not done with me." Von Herrnung's tone had a new note of triumph. He urged: "You go back to London—when? . . . The day after to-morrow. . . . *Gut!* . . . I have myself to visit London upon business—I shall see Isis with her beautiful new hair. One thing more. An address where I may call and see it. Be quick! We turn down here! . . ."

Patrine protested, peering with narrowed eyes through the dusk-blue twinkling semi-darkness. "But no! . . . That big marquee-thing at the end of this avenue—with all

the festoons of lights and the ring of promenade about it—surely that's the *Pavillon de la Danse?*"

"*Halt den Mund!*" His hand closed peremptorily on her arm: he hurried her down the trellised vine walk that invited on the left of them, as light measured footsteps padded on the gravel, and a man ran past calling, as it seemed, to somebody ahead:

"Miss Saxham ahoy! . . . Lady Beauvayse——"

"He's calling me. It's Captain Courtley. . . ." Patrine persisted.

"Let him call! Are you not with me?" Von Herrnung's tone was masterful. "You shall go to him when you have given me that London address!"

She was amused and yet annoyed by his persistency.

"Oh, all right! 'The Ladies' Social Club, Short Street, Piccadilly, West.' That's where I'm generally to be found when I'm in town."

"*Sehr gut!* Tell me once again, then I shall not forget, no!"

"Write it on your cuff!"

"It is written in a safer place," he told her. "We Prussian officers are trained to remember without writing things down. A face, an address, a conversation, the outlines of a country. Though for *reconnaissance* there is nothing like *die Photographie.*" He added: "When we meet in London I shall be able to tell you everything you wore to-night."

"Really! . . . How flattering! . . . You've made a mental inventory?"

They were retracing their steps to the avenue recently quitted. He walked with noiseless strides behind the tall, supple figure as it moved between the trellised vines and roses, gowned with its flaunting diadem, robed in the in sincere splendours of the opera-mantle already described.

"As you say. I shall be able to tell you that the back of your *mantel* was cut in a **V**-shape nearly reaching to your waist-line. Shall I tell you why?"

"If you're keen to. . . ." She felt a scorching breath between her shoulders and quickened her pace, making for the avenue. But he moved with her, his voice came thickly:

"Because your back is so superbly beautiful you cannot bear to hide it from men!"

"*Ah-h!*"

She whirled about, glaring like an angry leopardess, her strong white arm upraised to strike. Face, throat, and bosom glowed with painful crimson. Between her violated, insulted shoulders, his furious kiss still burned and stung.

"How dare you touch me!" she gasped. But he had shot past her even as she turned. He was running towards the avenue, calling gaily:

"Were you looking for us, Lady Beauvayse? Here we are!"

"Cad, cad!" she stammered. "Insufferable! beastly!" Then, because a scene was quite out of the question, she went forward with head held high, and resentment heaving her broad bosom, to meet Lady Beauvayse.

"Pat! You needle in a haystack," cried her friend, "where did you get to?"

"Nowhere. We missed you at the Café Concert," Patrine began.

"And then," von Herrnung explained, "we happened to take the wrong turn. But we have not gone far before we are recalled."

"—To the path of probity," suggested Lady Beauvayse, adding: "And in this instance the path of probity leads to the *Pavillon de Chahut.*" She explained to Patrine: "*Chahut* is the modern version of the *can-can*—famous in the days of the Second Empire; when the great cocodettes of the Court of the Tuileries—rivals of Cora Pearl and Skittles and other naughty persons—did high-kicking under the rose here, and they called the place Mabille."

It was not easy to get near the Pavillon, so dense and

variegated a crowd had congregated before its illuminated entrance. But the entrance fee was doubled. Gold must be paid to see the famous São Paulo dance. Thus many would-be pleasure-seekers of the less affluent kind turned back disappointed from the row of gilt turnstiles under the blazing archway, compelled to content themselves with the outer promenade.

Breasting the human eddy caused by these, Patrine and her party passed the barrier, climbed a flight of shallow gilt marble stairs carpeted with pink plush and decorated with roses and tree-ferns and reached the elevated promenade. Set within the circumference of the outer one, it commanded a complete view of the circular ball-room, to whose level descended from it at intervals yet other flights of broad gilt stairs, similarly carpeted and flower-decked for the convenience of those who wished to join the dancers, or return from the ball-room to the level of the promenade.

The revels were in full swing. Standing upon the brink, looking down as into a cockpit, you saw Patrine, superb in her false diadem and mock ermines, leaning her bare white hand upon a velvet-covered rail. At first she could only make out a giddying whirl of arms and heads and shoulders. Presently, the picture began to clear.

To the wail, clang and clash of strange, discordant, exotic music, rendered by an orchestra of coloured performers, two wide circles of dancers rhythmically spun. The floors they danced on were set at different levels, and rotated automatically,—each floor revolving in a different direction. Coloured lights, flung at intervals from reflectors in the ceiling, conveyed to Patrine the impression of staring down upon the whirling planes of a huge gyroscopic top.

Only the central space of shining parquet was void within the double circle of gyrating dancers. A crash from the orchestra and three couples, oddly costumed, leaped suddenly out upon the floor. Patrine could not make out where they had come from. They appeared, and there was a slight

commotion. A hedge of applauding spectators, four or five deep, formed about the central, stationary patch of parquet. The music changed, the six Brazilians began the famous dance.

They were not beautiful to look at it seemed to Patrine, the men, familiarly styled by voices in the crowd as Lauro, Pedro, and Herculano, being undersized, sleek-headed, lithe and sallow, attired in faultlessly fitting evening dress-coats, white vests, black satin knee-breeches, black silks, and buckled pumps. They wore shallow collars of curious cut, lawn-frilled shirts and wide black neckties. Their female companions were swarthy as Indians, even through their paint, and plain of feature. But their superb hair and eyes, the rounded grace of hip and waist and limb, the slenderness of throat and wrist and ankle, testified, like their tiny feet and high-arched insteps, to a strain of Spanish blood.

"La Rivadavia, Alexandrina, and Silvana," the eager spectators named them. They wore transparent sheaths, and brief, oddly *bouffante* overskirts, like flounced muslin lamp-shades with a boldly suggestive forward tilt. They began the dance with some familiar Tango figures. The poses, the approaches, the hesitations, were well known to Patrine.

"Nothing very new. . . . But—the music made by those buck niggers! '*Bizzarramente*' isn't the word for it. One expects to see gombos covered with serpent-skin, trumpets of elephant-tusk, skull-rattles, and all the paraphernalia of Obeah in the orchestra, instead of those huge, superb brass wind-instruments, cymbals as big as table-tops and ten-foot silver trumpets, like poor de Souza's. . . . Raised in the States, but wasn't he a Brazilian by birth?" It was the voice of Lady Beauvayse, and von Herrnung's answered from behind Patrine:

"It may be so. But the *Blechinstrumente* and the *Blasinstrumente*—for the biggest of those they have to go to

Germany. Nowhere else can they be made as there. . . . Bravo! . . . *Bis—bis!*"

He applauded. . . . Everybody was applauding. The gyroscopic whirl of dancers had become stationary. All now were eager spectators. And the three couples from São Paulo had reached the culminating point of a uniquely curious and exotic figure. Savage and violent, sinuous and creeping; suggestive of the nocturnal gambols of enamoured jaguars, in the deep primeval forests of Brazil.

"Horrid! One expects them to lash tails and roar. . . . I've got what Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch called 'cold clams walking up my backbone.'" Lady Beauvayse shuddered and made a pretty grimace. "All the same I think I'll go down and look at them a little closer. Ah-h! . . . Good grapes! Why, he simply picked her up by the scruff of the neck with his teeth and shook her. . . . I've just *got* to see that done over again!"

She was gone, with a whisk of the emerald bird of paradise and a waft of *parfum très persistant*. Captain Courtley vanished in her wake. Patrine made no motion to follow them.

The tense excitement, the pungent exhalations rising from the crowded ball-room were affecting her brain. She felt giddy, and the steady pressure of the crowd behind her was thrusting her to the very verge of the promenade. She yielded automatically, unconscious of danger near.

You are to see her there, poised on the verge of the rose-carpeted precipice, her hand gripping the velvet-covered railing, her wide nostrils distended, her broad bosom heaving as she inhaled the sultry, vitiated atmosphere, heavy with a myriad perfumes, tainted by a thousand breaths. Her stare, lifeless as the enamelled, glittering regard of some Princess-mummy of Old Egypt, was fixed upon the artists, of whom two couples had retired, as though in despair of competition with the chief favourites, leaving La Rivadavia and her comrade Herculano in possession of the floor.

And the passions expressed by the rhythmical, sinuous movements of these dancers grew moment by moment less human, and more bestial. Art of the most consummate was displayed and degraded. Beauty and Truth shone pre-eminent in the hideous display. Now the woman sank towards the ground, with supple limbs outstretched and her wild head thrown back in fierce surrender. Her white fangs gleamed, her dumb mouth seemed to roar. And as her conqueror crept stealthily towards her, the play of his great muscles could be seen beneath his civilised attire, as though his supple body had been clothed with the tawny-golden, black-dappled hide of the Brazilian jaguar.

As Herculano crouched and sprang, La Rivadavia's muscles visibly tightened. She bounded high, turned in the act. . . . Their gleaming fangs clashed in mid-air. And from the massed spectators came a hiss of excitement, "*Th-h-h!* . . ." like the hissing of a thousand snakes.

"Great Scott!" Patrine heard herself saying. "*Great—Scott!*"

She no longer heard von Herrnung harshly breathing behind her. . . . He had moved to the leftward. His tall, broad-shouldered figure now stood against the railing some dozen feet away. His well-cut face, seen in profile, was purplish-red to the crisp, scarlet waves topping his high square forehead. The big white hands that held the glasses glued to his eyes, jerked, and as he pressed against the railing Patrine knew that he was shuddering. Now he looked at her, and his ravaged face was terrifying to the girl.

"Will you not . . ." he began, thickly.

She quivered, cast a look about; saw the ugly emotion under which he laboured reflected in every face within her range of vision, as round after round of plaudits rose to the roof of the pavilion, escaping through the wide-open spaces between its gilded, rose-twined pillars into the night. The rafters vibrated with demands for a repetition of the popular sensation. The dancers accepted the encore.

If von Herrnung beckoned now, asking Patrine to go down with him amongst the acrid exhalations of that cockpit of variegated lights, thronged with excited men and strangely-bedizened women, rent by devastating emotions, drunk with strange excitements, would Patrine say Yes or No? . . .

*Ouf!* but it was hot. How thick the air was with those illusion perfumes. And from whence was that cool breeze blowing that suddenly freshened the heavy air? . . .

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE WIND OF JOY

PATRINE drew back from the edge of the promenade. A stout, swarthy Frenchman, a Southerner evidently, whose full brown face streamed with little rills of perspiration, stepped nimbly into her vacated place. His female companion instantly took his. The same movement was repeated—the packed bodies seemed to melt before her. In a few more steps she had merged from the crowd, upon the outer edge of the elevated promenade.

There was another velvet railing there, and steps leading down to the promenade upon the ground-level. Against the background of starlit sky and illuminated gardens stood the tall figure of a man. He was broad-shouldered and lightly built, the poise and balance of his figure admirable. But for the gleam of his living eyes in his tanned face, and the movements of his head as he turned it from side to side, evidently seeking somebody, he might have been a statue of Mercury cast in light-hued bronze.

For he wore loose, waist-high leggings strapped at the ankles, and a belted gabardine of thin light brown material, while a cap with an upturned brim and ear-flaps dangled from his sunburnt hand. And a uniformed official, all lacquered moustaches and gold-laced blue cloth, stood gesticulating a few paces from him, keen on defending from so unceremonious an intruder the integrity of the Upper Promenade.

"Monsieur cannot possibly descend into the ball-room . . . the costume of Monsieur is not appropriate. It offends against good taste. It outrages the proprieties. . . . It is *peu convenable* even that Monsieur should be here."

Patrine heard the protest, saw it driven home by swift expressive Gallic gestures, caught a gleam of mirth in the eyes of the oddly-garbed intruder, and the quirk of a smile at the corners of his mouth. No doubt the suggestion of the proprieties in connection with the traditions of Mabille had evoked it. She liked his face; it was lean and hard and rather hatchety, with a brave outlook of clear light eyes under the marked eyebrows, thick and straight and silvery-fair against his sunburnt skin. To her woman's eyes, Fatigue was stamped upon it and anxiety, and a kind of rueful impatience, as he apologised for the necessity of the intrusion in fragmentary but excellently accentuated French. He came in search of a friend, who was here and must be found; it was imperative. . .

"There is to-morrow!—there is always to-morrow!" the official stated with a wave.

"That's just the point. . . . To-morrow! . . ." The stranger's forehead was ploughed with lines of anxiety. He spoke in English now—the well-bred, modern, clipped English of the public school and the University. "No! you don't understand"—for the official had vigorously disclaimed all knowledge of the strange, barbarous tongue in which the other addressed him. "And I don't believe I'd ever make you. If I could only hammer into you what sort of a hat I'm in!"

He knitted his brows; pulled himself together for a crowning effort. Patrine spoke, not as a stranger yielding to a sudden, helpful impulse, but quite simply, with a little, joyful catching of her breath:

"Could I explain for you, do you suppose?"

"A—thanks! You're awfully good!"

He turned to her eagerly, if with a certain embarrassment.

"If you would. . . . There is a man here I have to get word to. And—what French I have is simply technical. . . . You hardly find it in modern dictionaries—the argot of the engine-shop and the Flying School."

"Now I understand. . . ." She smiled in his perplexed face, drinking in deep breaths of the fresh fragrant air that blew about them as they stood together behind the thick wall of bodies that hid the cockpit from their view. A deep dimple von Herrnung had never seen showed low down in one of her pale cheeks. Their whiteness was slightly tinged with delicate pale rose. And her eyes had lost their brilliant enamelled hardness. They shone like dusky stars as she went on: "Now I know why I thought of wide green spaces and a breeze blowing to me over gorse and heather as I looked at you. Sub-conscious memories of Hendon and Brooklands and Upavon. For you're a Flying Man!"

"Just that!" His ruefulness was banished. "And now you know how I come to be in Paris with the clothes I stand up in and not another rag. . . . Two of us flew the Channel yesterday morning. . . . If the weather holds decent, we should be on the wing again by four A.M. And my mechanic's given me the slip. To say he's taken French leave would be appropriate under the circumstances. Left a line—the cool—beggar!—to say I'd find him here."

"Too bad!" she said, as fresh furrows dug themselves into the tanned forehead. "Not fair to leave you in the cart like that. No wonder you followed—hot upon his track."

"Combed the whole place—everywhere they'll let me in. But my aviator's kit's against me. I've seen some rummy get-ups. But they draw the line at Carberry's overalls."

One hand rested easily on his hip, in the other hand he swung the eared cap with goggles. A pedestal in the moonlight would have suited him. It occurred to her to ask:

"What was he like—your runaway mechanic?"

"I hardly . . . Oh! . . . Little black-avised Welshman—barely tips the scale at eight stone. Has to be a light-weight, because I weigh all of eleven. And with the hovering-gear—but that can't interest you."

"Indeed it does. What of the hovering-gear?"

His face darkened and hardened. He said:

"It's an invention of mine. And after no end trying—our own people at Whitehall simply wouldn't have anything to do with me—the chiefs of the French Service Aëronautique consented to give it a test."

"Sporting of them, wasn't it?"

He agreed:

"No end sporting. So I bucked the tiger over the Channel with Davis—to find that an officer and mechanic of the S. A. were told off to try the hoverer over the selected area. For us to engineer the thing ourselves wasn't *'l'étiquette militaire.'* That's the French for Government red-tape."

"Bother etiquette! I'm beginning to sympathise with Davis!"

His vexation broke up in laughter.

"That's what *she* did. She sympathised with Davis and carried him off here."

Patrine said, a light breaking in on her:

"Why, of course, there would be a girl. . . . He'd hardly come to a place like this alone, would he?"

Some query in his look made her add hastily:

"What was she like?"

"Like. . . . The girl who's carried off Davis? . . ." He reflected a moment. "Pretty and plump and fluffy, with a pair of goo-goo eyes! She's daughter or niece or something"—he boggled the explanation rather—"to the German chap who hired us the hangar at Drancy—if you can give that name to a ramshackle shed in a waste building-lot! And Davis—thundering good man, but once on a spree . . ." He whistled dismally. "If I could only get my claws on him! . . ."

Here the uniformed official returned to the charge:

"Monsieur has found his friend—Monsieur has explained the situation. To enter the *Salon de Danse* with Madame

is not permissible—in the costume Monsieur displays. No doubt Madame will understand!"

Patrine said, with a slight catch in her breath, as though some drops of chilly pleasant perfume had been suddenly sprayed on her:

"He supposes . . . he thinks . . . that I'm . . . your friend!"

"I'll explain." He reddened, turning to the official, saying in the French of the British schoolboy, laborious, devoid of colloquialisms:

"*Monsieur, vous n'avez pas compris. Madame elle—elle n'êtes qu'une étrangère. Pour mon ami, je ne lui vois. Si vous permettre d'entrer, peut-être——*"

"*Rototo! Voyez, mon blousier, j'connais bien la sorte! Sufficit! Assez! Ça m' fait suer, comprends?*" The gold-braided arm described a magnificent sweep, the large white kid-covered hand indicated remote distance—"*Sortez! . .* "

The Briton, thus invited to retire, looked at Patrine.

"I can't quite follow, but it's plain he's telling me to hook it. The rest is—pretty—strong?"

She nodded, biting her lip.

"Frightfully rude. Not that I know much Paris slang. But a friend of mine—" She broke off to listen, as from under the functionary's waxed moustache rattled another sentence:

"*A l'instant, ou j'appelle l' sergent d'ville!*"

"He's talking about sending for the police now!" She added hastily: "Don't let him do that! Offer him a tip!"

The magic word must have been comprehended of the braided functionary. He ceased to fulminate. He waited, his avid eye upon the pair. The lean hatchety face of the aviator had flamed at Patrine's suggestion. He said:

"Don't you think I'd have tipped him in the beginning—if I'd had the wherewithal? But expenses have been fright-

ful!—the waste lot with the shed I've stalled the machine in costs as much as a suite of rooms at a decent middle-class hotel would. Had to fork rent in advance too. Proprietor's a German as well as a jerry-builder, and when I've paid his goo-goo girl for our coffee and rolls to-morrow morning"—the speaker exhibited a disc of shiny metal bearing the classical capped and oak-wreathed head of the Republic, value exactly twopence-halfpenny—"I'll have just one of these blessed tin things left."

"How rotten!" In the gilt metal vanity-bag, Patrine's inseparable adjunct, lurked, in the company of a mirror, powder-puff, and note-book, a tiny white silk purse. In the purse nestled two plump British half sovereigns, the moiety of Patrine's salary for the previous week. "Would you jump down my throat if I asked you to let me finance you?" she pleaded, an eager hand in the depths of the receptacle. "Why not?"

"Because I'm a decent man!" If he had been previously crimson he was now scarlet as a boiled lobster. "Thanks all the same, though! I can't wait here, even to catch Davis. . . . I must bike back to Drancy, where I've left the Bird—the machine—in the German's shed. . . Not a soul to keep an eye on her! . . . My heart's in my mouth when I think of what might hap—" He bit off the end of the sentence and went on: "But if you'd be so awfully kind as to take charge of this, in case you . . . There's a message written on it. . . ." He offered her a soiled, bent card.

"I understand. If I should chance to come across your Davis. . . . A little man . . . looking like a Welshman. . . . But you haven't told me whether he's dark or fair!"

"Black as a crow," he told her. "Not dressed like me!" His well-cut mouth began to twist upwards at the corners.

"Quite a swell, in a silk-faced frock-coat, white vest and striped accompaniments. A silk hat, too, rather curly

brimmed, but still, a topper. I suppose a friend of the lady's rented Davis the kit."

"Of the lady's? . . ." She remembered. "Yes, yes! Of course! . . . The German's appendage. . . . Why! . . . Look! . . . Those two people who have just passed the turn-stile at the other end of the Promenade. . . . If there's anything in description, here comes Davis with the goo-goo girl!"

"By—gum! You've nailed me the pair of them." As the aviator's long strides bore him down in the direction of the little sallow, black-avised mechanic in the capacious silk-faced frock-coat, and his high-bosomed, florid, flaxen-haired enchantress, and before the moustached guardian of the Promenade could renew his indignant protest, Patrine had dropped the little sovereign-purse in his deep, rapacious hand. And at that instant the music ended with a crashing succession of barbaric chords. The São Paulo dance was done.

"*Merci millefois, Madame!* . . ."

Patrine turned from the hireling's thanks to see the high head and powerful square shoulders of von Herrnung forging towards her, towering above the polyglot, variegated crowd. He hailed her with:

"So you met a friend? Is that why I found myself deserted?"

She answered coldly:

"I did not desert you—and I did not meet a friend."

His face, still suffused with a purplish flush, pouched and baggy about the eyes, told of the mäelstrom of unhealthy excitement the dance of the jaguars in the jungle had set whirling in his brain. She guessed that he had taken advantage of their separation to descend into the ball-room, and that as one of the spectators in the front rank he had revelled in the final thrill. He persisted:

"*Was?* But what means it? I have lost you. . . .

I think you must have gone down into the ball-room after your friend. . . . I follow and you are not there. I come back to find you. . . . Who was that dirty bounder I saw you talking to?"

"He wasn't a dirty bounder!" His rudeness enraged her. "He was a nice, clean, first-class, top-hole, plucky English boy!"

He sneered:

"'*Boy*' . . . Men of forty are boys, in the mouths of you English ladies. You borrow the term from women of the street-walking class."

"Then I'll call him a man. The best kind of man going! English—from the top of his nice head to the very tips of his toes."

"How can you tell if he was not a friend of yours? What do you know of him?" He fixed his eyes compellingly on hers.

She answered:

"Nothing but that he flew the Channel yesterday—with Davis—to test his invention—and he has got to be on the wing for home at four."

"So! He has told you all this, and you do not know his name, even? Perhaps it is on that card you hold in your hand?"

She started, and the card fluttered from her twitching fingers to the carpet.

"Allow me. . . ." Von Herrnung stooped as though to retrieve the bit of pasteboard. "Curious! It has gone! . . . It is not there!" he said.

"I think you have your foot on it." Her eyeballs ached, she felt weary, and flat, and stale. "Please lift up your foot and let me see if it is there," she urged, and grown suddenly obtuse, he lifted up the wrong foot. She was trying to explain that he had done so when they were rejoined by Courtley and Lady Beauvayse.

"Say, did you see she wore a head-band with a rubber

mouth-hold at the back of her neck? And waist-fixings under her frillies so's Herculano could swing her around his head. My land! that man has jaw-power to whip Teddy Roosevelt, and she's got vim enough for a nest of rattlesnakes. . . . Used up, Pat? . . . If you aren't, you look it!" The speaker yawned prettily: "I'm about ready to be taken back to by-by, though it's only two o'clock."

Von Herrnung escorted the wearer of the green bird of paradise as they went through dark alleys and illuminated avenues back to the archway with the blazing crowns and stars. Courtley accepted the offer of a lift back to the hotel. The German declined, saying that he preferred to walk, as the car was closed.

"Pardon! . . ." His voice had arrested Morris on the point of starting the Rolls-Royce. His handsome face had appeared in the frame of the car-window. "Excuses! but this belongs to Miss Saxham!" His cuff shone white in the semi-darkness, the great magpie pearl on his little finger gleamed maliciously as he dropped the missing card upon Patrine's lap, and drew back, uncovered and smiling, as the car moved away. Later on, when she was safe in her room, she looked at the card, and read upon it in plain black lettering:

ALAN SHERBRAND,

PILOT-INSTRUCTOR AND BUILDER OF AËROPLANES,
FANSHAW'S SCHOOL OF FLYING.

THE AËRODROME,
COLLINGWOOD AVENUE,
HENDON, N. W.

Something was scrawled in violet pencil on the upper blank space. Being a girl with notions about squareness,

Patrine would not at first read, remembering that it was his private message to Davis, whom Chance had brought within his master's reach. But later still, or earlier, when, after a brief interval of silence, the traffic of Paris began to roll over the asphalt, principle yielded to impulse. She switched on the electric light above her pillow and read:

"*This Sarajevo business spells War. Must get back at once to Hendon. I trust to your Honour not to fail me. You know what this means to*

"*A. S.*"

So the young Mercury in gabardine and overalls was a professional, a teacher; a pilot who helped men to qualify for the certificate given by the Royal Aëro Club without breaking too many bones. She had seen the big painted sign in the Collingwood Avenue, Hendon, that advertised Fanshaw's Flying School.

"*I trust to your Honour,*" he had written to his mechanic. The word would have seemed big, and awful, and imposing, spelt like that, with a capital "H," if the writer had been a gentleman.

Disillusioned, she tore the card into little pieces and sank into a heavy sleep before the broad yellow sunshine of Monday outlined the pink velvet brocade curtains unhygienically drawn before the open windows. And she dreamed, not of the magic wind that had blown upon her that night, nor of the Mercury-like figure in the suit of Carberrys, but of the supple bodies that had bounded and whirled, and of the gleaming panther-fangs that had clashed in mid-air. Then the dominant figure became that of von Herrnung. Again the red mouth under the tight-rolled red moustache alternately flattered, insulted, and cajoled. Again she felt that violation of her virgin flesh, its moist, hot touch upon her naked shoulder. Its kiss bit and stung.

She awakened late from those poisoned dreams to a riot-

ous blaze of colour and a breath of musky fragrance. On the coffee-stand beside her bed lay a great sheaf of long-stalked roses; deep orange-hearted, with outer petals of ruddy flame. She plunged her face deep into the flowers. The corner of a large square envelope thrust from amongst them. She caught it between her teeth and pulled it out.

It was from von Herrnung, written on paper bearing the device of the Société Aëronautique Internationale in the Faubourg St. Honoré. It was brief enough.

*"That I offended yesterday, Isis will pardon. The address I promised is—'Atelier Wiber*, 000, *Rue de la Paix.' The good Wiber demands no fee for making Beauty yet more beautiful. All has been arranged.*

*"Devotedly,*
*"T. v. H."*

## CHAPTER XVII

### INTRODUCES AN OLD FRIEND

Saxham, M.D., F.R.C.S., M.V.O., Consulting Surgeon to St. Stephen's and the Hospital of St. Stanislaus and St. Teresa, sat busily writing at the big leather-topped table in the consulting-room, that, with the well-stocked library adjoining, occupied the rearward ground-floor of the Harley Street corner house.

The hands of the table-clock pointed to eleven A.M. Since nine the doctor had sat at the receipt of patients, the crowd in the waiting-room had melted down to half a dozen souls. Fourteen years had gone by since Saxham, late Temporary Captain, R.A.M.C., attached Headquarters Staff, H.I.M. Forces, Gueldersdorp, had taken over the lease and bought his practice from the fashionable physician who had been ruined by the war slump in South African mining-stocks.

The broken speculator's successor had struck pay-reef from the outset. Society had taken Saxham up and could not afford to drop him again. He was harsh and unconciliatory in manner—a perfect bear, according to Society—but quite too frightfully clever; and as yet no speedier rival had outrun him in the race.

Now as the July sunshine, its fierceness tempered by the short curtains of pale yellow silk that screened the wide-open windows, came streaming in over the fragrant heads of a row of pot-grown rose-trees, ranged on the white-enamelled window-seat, it shone upon a man to whom both Time and Fortune had been kind. The admirable structure of bone, clothed with tough muscle and firm white flesh, had not suffered the degrading changes inseparable from obesity. Nor had the man waxed lean and grisly in proportion as his

banking account grew fat. His scholar's stoop bowed the great shoulders even more, disguising the excessive development of the throat and deltoid muscles. The square, pale face, with the short aquiline nose and jutting under-lip, was close-shaven as of old. The thickly growing black hair was streaked with silver-grey and tufted with white upon the temples. His loosely fitting clothes of fine silky black cloth were not the newest cut, neither were they old-fashioned. They were suited perfectly to the man.

While Saxham minutely copied his prescription, the patient who sat facing the window in the chair on the doctor's left hand had not ceased from the enumeration of a lengthy catalogue of symptoms, peculiar to the middle-aged, self-indulgent, and tightly-laced. At the close of a thrilling description of after-dinner palpitations, she became aware that her hearer's attention had strayed. Following up his glance she ran him to earth in one of three tinted photographs that stood in a triptych frame upon his writing-table, and glowed with an indignation that tinged with violet a plump face coated with the latest complexion-cream.

"How very charming your wife is—still!"

The speaker, her recent character of patient now merged in that of visitor, plucked down her veil of violet gauze with a gesture that betrayed her wrath. But her voice was carefully honeyed to match her smile—as she continued:

"You have been married quite an age, haven't you?"

The anniversary of her own second honeymoon was due next week. She went on answering her own query:

"Nearly fourteen years, I think?"

Saxham answered, not glancing at the silver table-almanac but at the threefold photograph frame:

"To be precise, just fourteen years and six weeks. We were married on the 6th of June, 1900."

"You have a good memory—for some things!"

The undisguised resentment in her tone pulled Saxham's head round. He surveyed her with genuine surprise. She

bit her lips and tossed her head, waggling her tall feather, jingling her strings of turquoise and amber, coral and onyx, kunzite and olivine, big blocks of which semi-precious stones were being worn just then, strung on the thinnest of gold chains. Each movement evoked a whiff of perfume from the scanty folds of her bizarre attire. Her frankly double chin quivered, and her redundant bosom, already liberally displayed through its transparent covering of embroidered chiffon, threatened to burst its confining bands of baby-ribbon, as the Doctor said:

"Is it not natural that I should have a particularly clear recollection of the greatest day of all my life—save one?"

"You're quite too killing, Owen!"

She laughed tunelessly, clanking her precious pebbles.

"Of course, we all know you're fearfully swanky about your wife's beauty. I saw her yesterday at Lord's—sitting under the awning on the sunny side, with the Duchess of Broads and Lady Castleclare. Your boy was with them, jumping out of his skin over Naumann's bowling for Oxford. Really marvellous! Your poor dear Cambridge hadn't a chance! Tremendously like you he grows—I mean Bawne. Really, your very image!"

"I should prefer," said Saxham, stiffly, "that my son resembled his mother."

"Ha, ha, ha! How quite too romantic!" She threw back her head, its henna-dyed hair plastered closely about it and fastened with buckles of jade, set with knobs of turquoise. A kind of stove-pipe of enamel green velvet crowning her, was trimmed with a band of miniature silk roses in addition to the towering violet plume. The plume, carefully dishevelled so as to convey the impression of a recent wetting, threatened the electric globe-lamp springing from a standard near. Her crossed legs liberally revealed her stockings of white silk openwork, patterned with extra-sized dragon-flies in black chenille, and her laugh

rattled about Saxham's vexed ears like Harlequin's painted bladder, full of little pebbles or dried peas. "In love with your wife—and after fourteen years and six weeks!" Her fleshy shoulders shook, and her opulent bosom heaved stormily. She passed a little filmy perfumed handkerchief under her violet gauze veil and delicately dabbed the corners of her eyes. "You remind me of my poor David. I was always the *one woman on earth*, in his opinion. To the last, he was jealous of the slightest reference to you!"

"To *me?* Why should he have been?"

Mildred—for this was Saxham's faithless bride-elect of more than twenty years previously—swallowed her wrath with an effort, and went on with the mulish obstinacy of her type:

"Perhaps it was absurd. But men in love are unreasonable creatures, and David was perfectly mad where I was concerned. He worshipped me to the point of idolatry! He never could *quite* believe that I did not regret my—my choice—that my heart did not sometimes escape from his keeping in dreams, and become yours again, Owen! He never *really* cared for Patrine, because she has a look of you. . . . Absurd, considering that she was born two years after you disappeared into South Africa. . . . Though of course I could not truthfully say that I did not—think of you a great deal!"

It seemed to the silent man who heard, that Mildred offended against decency. His soul loathed her. She went on:

"Her brother—my darling boy who died—was the very image of David!" Her tone was even womanly and tender in speaking of the dead boy. "But Patrine—a year younger —Patrine is really wonderfully like you, with her commanding figure and almost Egyptian profile, those long eyes under straight eyebrows—and all those masses of dead-black hair!" As Saxham writhed under the category she gave out her irritating laugh again. "Ah!—I forgot!

When Patrine was in Paris with Lady Beauvayse for the Big Week—Lady Beau took her to the Atelier Wiber—the famous hairdresser's establishment at 000, Rue de la Paix —where they specialise in *Chevelures des Teintes Moderne*—all the newest effects displayed by stylish mannequins—and really the change is astonishing—her sister Irma and I hardly *knew* Patrine when she came to see us at Kensington—looking superb, with hair—one might almost call it terra-cotta coloured—showing up her creamy-white skin."

"Do you tell me that Patrine has bleached her splendid hair and stained it with one of those vile dyes that are based on aniline—or Egyptian henna at the best?"

Mildred retorted acidly:

"It was a very expensive process. . . . Five hundred francs—but I understand that Lady Beauvayse was so good as to insist on paying Wiber's charges herself."

Saxham answered brusquely:

"I would have given ten times the money to know my niece's hair unspoiled. Whoever paid, the process will prove an expensive one to Patrine when she finds herself excruciated by headaches, or when the colour changes—as it will by-and-by!"

Mildred shrugged:

"She can have it re-dipped, surely? Or let it return to its original black!"

"There are many chemical arguments against human hair so altered returning to its original colour," came from Saxham grimly. "As these women who have made coiffures of orange, pink, crimson, blue and green, fashionable, had previously found to their cost. Do you not realise that from mishaps of this kind resulted the chromatically tinted heads one sees at public functions? Bizarre and strange in the electric lights, hideous in the sun."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Mildred's laugh rattled about the Doctor's ears like a shower of walnuts. "I shall certainly

bring Patrine to call upon you, if her hair happens to turn peacock-green or pinky-crimson. I would not miss seeing your face for all the world! But seriously, my dear Owen, when a girl is as handsome as my girl and has no *dot* to back her, she must make herself attractive and desirable to eligible men."

"By trying to make herself look like a Parisian *cocotte*, she renders herself neither attractive nor desirable—to the kind of man whom I should like to see married to my niece. The cleanly kind of man, with wholesome tastes, a sound constitution, and an upright character."

"My dear Owen, you might be composing an advertisement for a butler or a *chauffeur!*"

Mildred ostentatiously controlled a yawn as the Doctor continued:

"As to a provision for Patrine on her marriage, you know that I shall gladly give it. Of course, upon condition——"

"Yes, yes, I know what your condition would be!" Mildred's finger-tips, adorned with nails elaborately veneered and dyed, drummed a maddening little tattoo on the table-ledge. "That she marries the 'right kind of man, with wholesome tastes,' and all the rest of it. The question is—would Patrine be able to endure him? She is—let us say—more than a little difficult to get on with—and essentially an independent, up-to-date girl."

"If Patrine would have subdued her ideas about independence and given up this idea of taking a place as salaried companion, I would have welcomed her, and so would my wife!"

"Patrine is—as you are very well aware—something very different to a mere companion. She is reader and secretary to Lady Beauvayse. Her Club subscription is paid, she moves there amongst gentlewomen, and is treated at Berkeley Square exactly like a favoured guest. You should see the presents Lady Beauvayse absolutely

showers upon her—and she gets all her expenses and a hundred a year."

Saxham was silent. Patrine might have had all this and much more, if she would have accepted the home he offered. Not only because she was his niece, but the girl was dear to him. His wife loved her, and in her strange, wild way Patrine returned some measure of Lynette's tenderness.

"She is worth loving," Lynette had told her husband. "She has a generous, brave, independent nature and a deep heart. She is not easily won because she is so well worth winning. Ah! if the Mother were only with us, how well she would understand and help Patrine!"

But Mildred had risen to depart. Saxham rose too, not without alacrity, and taking her offered hand, pressed it and let it fall to her side.

"Well, good-bye. My kind regards to Captain Dyneham." He referred to the second legal possessor of Mildred's once coveted charms. "When can I dine with you at Kensington, do you ask? I fear I have very few opportunities for sociality. Some day! . . . Tell Patrine to come and see me. Half-past one o'clock to-morrow. Lunch after my scolding—and a chat with Lynette."

"You are extremely kind to Patrine." Mildred's tone was sweetly venomous. "But I fear just at present she has little time to spare. Men in love are so exacting. Dear me, what a feather-brained creature I am! . . . Haven't I told you about Count von Herrnung?"

"You have told me nothing," said Saxham, "and you know it. Who and what is the man?"

Mildred said with a great air of dignity:

"He is a distinguished officer of the Prussian Flying Service, the son and heir of a high official in the German Foreign Office. He holds the rank of Count by courtesy. I assure you I never met a more agreeable young man."

"Even were he all that you say, and more, and even while I regard the German Army as a marvel of organisation and

efficiency—I should not, knowing the type of man that is the product of their military system, desire my niece to marry a German officer."

Mildred mocked:

"'Marry'—who said anything about marriage? . . . When they have not known each other for a month. Not"—her tone became sentimental—"that I am a disbeliever in love at first sight. No one could doubt that Patrine is attracted, and he—the Count"—she dropped her eyelids—"is simply too fearfully gone for words. Absolutely dead-nuts!"

"'Gone.' . . . 'Dead-nuts.' . . ."

"I give you my word. Entangled hopelessly. 'What a captive to lead in chains,' I said to Patrine—he is quite six feet in height or over, and has the most perfect features; simply magnificent eyes, the most fascinating manner, and the build of a Greek athlete. He is staying at the 'Tarlton,' and I must say Lady Beauvayse is extremely sympathetic. For since they came back from Paris together the Count has been taking Patrine about everywhere. She can hardly have had a glimpse of my gay girl. . . . Dinners, theatres, the opera, and heaven knows what else, they have crowded into the week!" The smiling speaker shrugged her ample shoulders. "To say nothing of cabaret suppers and dances. He even promises to take her to the famous 'Upas Club.' Wonderful, by all accounts. They say the French Regency came nowhere near it. Dancing in the Hall of the Hundred Pillars, a simply wonderful three A.M. supper, and champagne of the most expensive brands, served up in gold-mounted crystal jugs."

"Can it be possible? . . ." broke from Saxham. "Are you mad, that you countenance this German in taking Patrine to such an infamous place?"

"'Infamous!' Really, Owen, your notions are too old-fashioned for anything." Her laughter broke out, and her chains and bangles jingled an accompaniment. "Do," she

urged, "come out of your shell. Dine with us on Thursday. We have a box for the 'Ministers' Theatre. We'll go on, you and I, George and Irma, from there to the cabaret supper at the 'Rocroy.' We can't afford the 'Upas,' the subscription is too fearfully prohibitive. But the entertainment at the 'Rocroy' is really *chic*—the dancing is as good—everyone says—as they have it at Maxim's. Do come! Of course, you can trust us not to blab to your wife! Mercy! how severe you look!" Her tone changed, became wheedling, her made-up eyes languished tenderly. "Odd! how we poor, silly women prefer the men who bully us. Come! One chance more. Dine Thursday and see 'Squiffed' at the 'Ministers'—try a whiff of Paris at the 'Rocroy' after midnight, 'twill buck you up like nothing else—take my word! Won't you?"

"I will not!"

"Why not?"

"I have told you why not. Because these places are centres of corruption, schools for the inculcation and practice of vice in every form. Men and women, young or old, those who take part in or witness one of these loathsome dances, hot and reeking from the brothels and voodoo-houses of Cuba and the Argentine are equally degraded. I had rather see my niece Patrine dead and in her coffin than know her capable of appreciating such abominable exhibitions, pernicious in their effects, as I, and others of my profession have grave reason to know!—ruinous in their results to body, mind, and soul!"

"Intolerable!"

Her plump, middle-aged face was leaden grey beneath her violet veil as she screamed at him:

"You have insulted me! Horribly—abominably! . . . How dare you tell me that I frequent infamous places, and encourage my daughter to visit schools of vice! And it is not for Irma you are so rottenly scrupulous, but for Patrine, your wife's favourite! Who will do as she pleases, and

marry whom she prefers without 'by your leave' or with mine! She is a mule for self-will and obstinacy—another point of resemblance to yourself! . . ."

He had recovered his stern self-possession. His face was granite as he said:

"I have not insulted you, but if you will set no example to your daughters in avoiding these evils, it is my duty to expostulate."

She reared like an angry cobra, then spat her jet of scalding venom.

"I take leave to think my present example quite harmless to Irma and Patrine. Now yours—of a few years ago—was certainly calculated to damage the bodily and worldly prospects of your son." She added, as Saxham silently put out his hand to touch the bell: "No! please don't ring. I know my way out. Good-morning. . . . Pray remember me to Bawne and your wife!"

## CHAPTER XVIII

### SAXHAM PAYS

Thus, having shot her bolt, Mildred departed. The Dop Doctor standing in the open doorway, watched the gaily-accoutred, middle-aged figure in the peg-top skirt and *bouffante* tunic of green taffeta patterned with a violet grape-vine, moving down the white-panelled corridor.

Saxham watched her out of sight before he shut the door and went back to his chair. There he sat thinking. . . . No one would disturb the Doctor until he touched his electric bell.

Ah! if the truth were told, not all of us find solace in the thought that in the niches of Heaven are safely stored our ancient idols. To Owen Saxham it was gall and verjuice to remember that for love of this woman, weak, vain, silly, spiteful, he, the man of intellect and knowledge, had gone down, quick, to the very verge of Hell.

Mildred was just eighteen when he had wooed and won her. She had been slight and willowy and pale, with round, surprised brown eyes, an indeterminate nose, and a little mouth of the rosebud kind. Her neck had been long and swanlike, her waist long and slim, her hands and feet long and narrow. He had desired her with all the indiscriminating passion of early manhood. He had planned to pass his life by her side. He had hoped that she might bear him children—he had wrought in a frenzy of intellectual and physical endeavour to take rank in his chosen profession, that Success might make life sweeter for Mildred—his wife.

She had seemed to love him, and he had been happy in that seeming. Then the shadow of a tragic error had fallen blackly across his path. From the omission to copy in his

memorandum-book a prescription made up by himself in a sudden emergency had sprung the branding suspicion that culminated in the Old Bailey Criminal Case of the Crown *v.* Saxham. His acquittal restored to him freedom of movement. He left the Court without a stain on his professional reputation, but socially and financially a ruined man.

Friends and patients fell away from Saxham—acquaintances dropped him. Mildred—his Mildred—was one of the rats that scurried from the sinking ship. She had thrown him over and married David, his brother. Her betrayal had been the wreath of nightshade crowning Saxham's cup of woe. Those vertical lines graven on his broad white forehead, those others that descended from the outer angles of the deep-cut nostrils to the corners of that stern mouth of his, and yet those others at the angles of the lower jaw, were chiefly Mildred's handiwork. They told of past excess, a desperate effort to drown Memory and hasten longed-for death on the part of a man who had quarrelled with his God.

The demons of pride and self-will, defiance and scorn had been cast out. An ordeal such as few men are called upon to endure had purified, cleansed, and regenerated the drunkard. Friendship had taken the desperate man by the hand, plucked his feet from the morass, led him into the light and set his feet once more on firm ground. His profession was his again to follow. Love, real love, had come to him and folded her rose-white wings beside his hearth.

Years of pure domestic happiness, of successful work, had passed, and now—the July sunshine had no warmth in it, though it streamed in through the open window over the tops of the pot-roses. The Dop Doctor's head was bowed upon his hands, his great shoulders shook as though he strove with a mortal rigour, the wood of the table where his elbows leaned, the boards beneath the thick carpet on which his feet rested, creaked as the long shudders convulsed him at intervals.

It had seemed to Saxham—in whom the seed of Faith had germinated and put forth leaves in one great night of storm following upon years of arid dryness—that Almighty God must have forgiven those five worse than wasted years.

Fool! he now cried in his heart. The Divine Mercy is boundless as the ocean of air in which our planet swims, and for the cleansing of our spotted souls the Blood of the Redeemer flowed on Calvary. But He who said in His wrath that the sins of the fathers should be visited on the children, does not break, even for those repentant prodigals whom He has taken to His Heart again—the immutable laws of Nature. Nature, of all forces most conservative, wastes nothing, loses nothing, pardons nothing, avenges everything.

The shouted curse, like the whispered blessing, is carried on the invisible wings of Air forever. Thus, the deformed limb, the devouring cancer, the loathsome ulcer, and the degrading vice, are perpetuated and reproduced as diligently and faithfully as the beautiful feature, the noble quality, the wit that charms, the genius that dominates. Nay, since Nature turns out some millions of fools to one Dante or Shakespeare or Molière or Cervantes, it would appear that she prefers the fools.

So it is. Divine Grace has reached and saved the sinner. The ugly vice, the base appetite, have been eradicated by prayer and mortification, by years of self-control and watchfulness. Free will, moral and physical force, self-command and self-respect are yours again. And with sobs of gratitude the erstwhile slave of Hell gives thanks to Heaven.

Saved. Cured. Great words and true in Saxham's case as in many others. But though they are saved and cured they cannot ever forget. Their eyes have a characteristic look of alert, suspicious watchfulness. For wheresoever they move about the world, in the drawing-rooms of what is called Society, in the business circles of the City, in the barracks or the mining-camp, on the ship's heaving deck or the floor of the Pullman carriage; amidst the sands of the

Desert or the golden-rod of the prairie, or the red sand and dry karroo scrub of the lone veld, they will hear, when they least expect it, the thin, shrill hiss of the Asp that once bit them to the bone. Or supposing that they have forgotten in reality—so cleverly has the world pretended to!—with what a pang of mortal anguish Memory awakens. When you recognise the devil that once entered and possessed you, looking out of the eyes of your child.

When Saxham lifted up his ashen face and looked at the portrait in the third leaf of the triptych frame and met the clear, candid gaze of his son's blue eyes, you know what he was seeking, and praying not to find.

To have given Lynette a drunkard for her son would be the most terrible penalty that could be exacted by merciless Nature for those five sodden, wasted years.

Ah! to have had a clean, unspotted life to share with Bawne's fair mother. That his priceless pearl of womanhood should gleam upon a drunkard's hand—his spotless Convent lily have opened to fullest bloom in a drunkard's holding, had been from the outset of their married life, verjuice in Saxham's cup by day, and a thorn in his pillow by night.

But never before had it occurred to the man of science, the great surgeon, the learned biologist, that relentless Nature might be saving up for him, Saxham, a special rod in saltest brine.

Bawne. . . . He sat in silence with set teeth, asking himself the bitter question:

"How could I have forgotten—Bawne?"

## CHAPTER XIX

### BAWNE

As so often happens, the thought of the beloved heralded his well-known thump upon the door-panel. When had the Dop Doctor ever cried, "Come in!" with such a leaden sinking of the heart?

The boy who came in was alert, upright, slim, and strong for his twelve years. You saw him attired in the dress with which we are all familiar—the loose shirt of khaki-brown, with its knotted silk neckerchief of dark blue, the lanyards ending in clasp-knife and whistle, the roomy shorts upheld by a brown leather pouch-belt supporting a serviceable axe, the dark blue stockings turned over at the knee, fitting close to the slim muscular legs, the light strong shoes, the brown smasher hat with the chin-strap, completed the picture of a Scout of whom no patrol need be ashamed. He carried his light staff at the trail, and entering, brought it to an upright position, and saluted smartly. The salute formally acknowledged, he came straight to the table and stood at his father's elbow, waiting, as Saxham feigned to blot a written line. Outwardly composed, the drumming of the man's heart deafened him, and a mist before his eyes blurred the page they were bent upon. Fatherhood gripped him by the throat as in the first moment of his son's separate existence. A thing we prize is never so poignantly precious as when we contemplate the possibility of its ruin or loss.

"Father, you aren't generally pleased when I come bothering you in consulting hours, but this time it is really serious business, no kid, and Honour bright!"

Saxham answered with equal gravity:

"If you have a reasonable excuse for coming, I have said that you may come."

The boy was like him. You saw it as he stood waiting. The vivid gentian-blue eyes were Saxham's, as were the thick throat and prominent under-jaw and the square facial outline. But the plume of hair that swept over the broad forehead was red-brown like Lynette's. The delicate, irregular profile and a sensitive sweetness about the lips were gifts from his mother. The directness of his look, and the tinge of brusqueness in his speech were unconsciously modelled on the father's, as he said, sacrificing sufficient of manly independence to come within the curve of the Doctor's strong arm:

"First, I wanted to show you my new badge."

Saxham's left hand squeezed the arm most distant from him, where a familiar device was displayed upon the sleeve, midway, between the shoulder and elbow, below the six-inch length of colours distinctive of this Scout's Patrol.

"Turn round and show it, then!"

"Father, you're larking. That's my General Scout Badge. I've had it ever since I passed my Second Class tests. Before then, you know, when I was a Tenderfoot, I'd only the top-part—the *fleur-de-lis* without the motto, and you wear that in your left pocket button-hole. But this is something special, don't you see?"

Saxham eyed the row of little enamelled circles on the sleeve next him with respectful gravity. The boy went on, trying to control the gleeful tremor in his voice:

"I've got the Ambulance Badge!—look at the Geneva Cross!—and the Signaller's Badge—this is it—with the crossed flags—and the Interpreter's Badge—the one with the two hands holding. But this is the very latest. Our Scoutmaster gave it to me after parade to-day. It's the Airman's Badge—" He caught his breath, the secret was coming in a moment. . . . He went on: "To get it you must have made a model aëroplane. Not a flying-stick,

any kid of nine can make one—but a model that will really fly. That's my special reason for coming. Mother was out—and—and next to her I wanted to tell you!"

"And next after me?"

The boy considered a moment before he looked up to answer:

"Cousin Pat, because she can keep a secret so tightly."

Saxham patted the sturdy square shoulders.

"You are fond of Cousin Patrine, aren't you?"

"Rather!"

"Just tell me why?"

"Because"—the young brows were puckered—"because she's so big and so—beautiful. And she'd just die for you and Mother. . . . She comes in my prayers next after you two."

"And—the Chief Scout?"

"Father, wouldn't it be—a bit cheeky to go and pray for a man like that?"

A spark of laughter wakened in Saxham's sombre eyes.

"Not quite respectful, you think? Is that it? Why so, when you're taught to pray for the Holy Father, Mother Church, and the King and Queen?"

The boy's puckered brows smoothed. The question was settled.

"Of course. I forgot. Then the Chief Scout must come in after Cousin Patrine. Because a gentleman must always give place to a lady. That's what Mother says."

"Suppose Cousin Patrine never came to see you any more, what would you do then?"

Bawne straightened the sturdy body and proclaimed:

"I would go and find her and bring her back!"

"Suppose she did not want to come?"

Bawne said instantly:

"I would tell her Mother was wanting her. For Mother would be, you know. And Cousin Pat wouldn't keep her waiting. Not much, sir, she wouldn't!"

"She cares so?"

"Doesn't she! Why, have you forgotten when I was a little shaver and Mother was so ill?"

Saxham, with a certain tightening of the muscles of the throat, recalled the wan, red-eyed spectre that had haunted the landing outside the guarded bedroom where Lynette lay, white and strengthless, while her husband fought for her with Death.

"Well, well. Go on loving Patrine and praying for her! Now tell me of your model."

The boy said, controlling his exultation:

"It has to be left at our District Headquarters until to-morrow. You see—it's rather a special affair. It's not a flying stick, like the things I used to make when I was a shaver, nor a glider—you see men in spectacles flying those every day to please the kids on Hampstead Heath and in Kensington Gardens, but a model of a Bristol monoplane with a span of thirty inches, and a main-plane-area of a hundred and fifty"—he caught his breath and with difficulty kept his eager words from tumbling over one another as he reached the thrilling climax—"and I built up her fuselage with cardboard and sticking-plaster out of the First Aid case you gave me to carry in my belt-pouch, and cut the propeller out of a tin toy engine I've had ever since I was a kid—and made the planes of big sheets of stiff foolscap strengthened with thin strips of glued wood, and her spars, sir!—the upright ones are quills, and her stays and struts I made of copper wire and she's weighted with lead ribbon like what you wrap about the gut when you're bottom-fishing for tench or barbel—and her motor-power is eighteen inches of square elastic twisted—and father"—he broke into a war-dance of ecstasy unrestrained—"when Roddy Wrynche and me went on a secret expedition to Primrose Hill to test her—she flew, sir! First go-off—by George!"

"Really flew? . . . You are certain?"

"Upon my life, sir, and that's my Honour. Scout's

Honour and life are the same thing. That's what the Oath rubs into us." He squared his shoulders and lowered his voice as a boy speaking of high matters that must be dealt with reverently. "I think it's—ripping. I can say it. Would you like me to?"

Saxham nodded without speaking, because of that choking something sticking in his throat. That something Lear called "the mother." And, dammed away behind his eyes, were scalding tears that only men may shed. As the young voice said:

"On my Honour I promise that I will do my best to be loyal to God and the King.

"On my Honour I promise that I will do my best to Help other people at all times.

"On my Honour I promise that I will do my best to obey the Scout Law. . . . You see"—the boyish arm was on Saxham's shoulder now, the ruddy-fair cheek pressed against the pale, close-shaven face—"you see, Father, when a Scout says 'On my Honour' it's just as if he swore on the Crucifix!"

Saxham said, crushing down the fierce emotion that had almost mastered him:

"It is—just the same! For the man who breaks a promise will never keep an oath. . . . I have a friend of whom I have told you. . . . I think he would like to hear about your model aëroplane. . . . May I tell him, or would you prefer to tell him yourself?"

Bawne's fair face glowed. He gasped in ecstasy:

"*Father*. . . . You mean Mr. Sherbrand—your Flying Man who's in the Hospital?"

"My Flying Man—but he is well again and back at work at Hendon. There was not much the matter with him; a slight obstruction in one of the nasal passages that prevented him from breathing with his mouth shut as he should. Now he has asked me—this afternoon if I am at leisure—to bring my little son to the aërodrome and see him make a flight."

"And go up in his aëroplane with him? Father, say Yes! Do, please do!"

As the little figure bobbed up and down beside him in joyous excitement, Saxham answered, not without an inward tug:

"If your mother says 'Yes' I shall not say No! Now off with you, my son!"

The boy saluted and went. Even his bright obedience wrung his father's heart. The man looked haggard and old. He hid his careworn face in his hands for a minute. His lips were still moving when he looked up and made the Sign so well known to many of us upon his forehead and breast. Prayer, that most powerful of all therapeutic agents, so often prescribed by Saxham for his patients, was his own tonic and sedative in moments of bodily exhaustion and mental overstrain.

He had prayed, he, the sceptic, on that unforgettable night at Gueldersdorp, when he wrestled with his possessing fiend. . . . Lynette had taught him the habit of prayer. And even as she, a friendless, neglected waif, had learned to look up and see the shining Faces of our Divine Redeemer and His Virgin Mother through the features of a pure and tender woman; so her husband, looking in the eyes of Lynette, had found the gift of Faith lost years before.

"Oh! . . . Prayer!" you say—"Faith!" . . . and I see you shrug and sneer a little, you who are intellectual and highly educated, and have ceased to believe in what you term the Hebraic myth or the Christian legend—since you learned to point out the weak places in the First Book of Genesis, and sneer at the discrepancies between the statements of the Gospel narrators—though you will hear such testimonies sworn to in good faith, wherever witnesses are examined in a Court of Law.

But no! you tell me, you are not an Agnostic. You credit the existence of Almighty God, but prayer is the parson's affair. Well, because a man wears a straight black coat,

will you abandon to him so inestimable a privilege? Is it not a marvellous thing that you or I should lift up our earth-made, earth-begrimed hands, and that He who set this tiny planet to spin out its æons of cycles amidst the innumerable millions of systems wheeling through His Universe should stoop to hear the words we utter? Feeble cries, drowned by the orchestras of the winds, and the chorus of the Spheres revolving in their orbits, or silent utterances imperceptible to any Ear save His alone.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE MODERN HIPPOCRATES

PATIENTS rapidly succeeded one another in the chair that faced the window. There were confirmed invalids who were really healthy men and women, and certain others who came in smilingly to talk about the weather and the newest Russian Opera, who bore upon their faces the unmistakable stamp of mortal disease. The wife or the husband, the father or the mother had worried for nothing. . . . Would the Doctor prescribe a little tonic to buck them, or the surgeon alleviate a little trouble of the local kind? Really nothing—but—Death's knock at the door. And there were cases—open or unacknowledged—of the liquor-habit and the drug-mania. To these, instead of dropping out bromide of potassium and throwing in the chloral hydrates with strychnine and the chloride of the metal that is crushed and assayed out of the quartz reef near Johannesburg, or pick-axed out of the frozen ground of the Klondyke, Saxham dealt out that savage tonic Truth, in ladlesful.

The secret dipsomaniac or druggard could not deceive this man's keen scrutiny, or escape his unerring diagnosis. When, beaten, they admitted the fact, Saxham said to them as to the others:

"You say you cannot conquer the craving. I myself once thought so. Your moral power can be restored, even as was mine. In your case the habit is barely as ingrained as in the case I quote to you. I drank alcohol to excess for a period of five years."

Some of the sufferers—elderly women and mild-mannered old gentlemen—were horrified. Others thought such candour brutal—but attractively so. Yet others responded to

the sympathy masked by the stern, impassive face, and the blunt, brusque manner.

"At any rate the man's no humbug!" such and such an one would stutter. "And seems to have any amount of Will. Think I shall put myself in his hands for a bit." Adding with a rueful twinkle: "He knows how the dog bites, if anyone does!"

He did, and those hands of his were strong, prompt and unfaltering. Since the grip of human sympathy had fastened on the Dop Doctor of Gueldersdorp, and drawn him up out of the depths into sunlight and free air, and set his feet once more on the firm ground, how many of his fellow-sufferers had Saxham not hauled reeking and squelching out of the abysmal sludge, whose secrets shall only be revealed upon the Last Day.

Yet Saxham realised that the grand majority of these twentieth-century men and women really wanted little more of the physician and surgeon than the thirteenth-century patient desired of the apothecary or the leech. A patient hearing given to their category of evils—a little hocus-pocus, and a nostrum or so.

We scoff, thought Saxham, at the ignorance of those men of the Dark Ages, yet in this enlightened era the eye of newt and toe of frog, the salted earthworms, and the *Pulvis Bezoardicus Magistralis* or *Pulvis Sanctus*, dissolved in the liquor of herbs gathered under a propitious conjunction of their ruling planets with the Moon—have but given place to extract of the dried thyroid gland of the sheep, the ovaries of the guinea-pig, the spinal cord and brain of rabbits and mice and other small mammalia, with—instead of broth of vipers, liquor distilled from the parotid secretion of the tropical toad; identical with the reptile administered in boluses to Pagan patients by the Greek Hippocrates. With other remedies hideously akin to the hell-brews that whipped the sated desires of Tiberius and Nero. . . . Such as the pastelloids frequently prescribed by bland-

mannered, frock-coated, twentieth-century physicians—professing Christians who pay West-End pew-rents, and deplore the abnormal drop in the birth-rate—for the spurring of the sense of debilitated Hedonists.

Thus, summed Saxham, we have rediscovered Organotherapy. We have harnessed the bacillus to Hygeia's silver chariot. In Surgery the Short Circuit is the latest word. It is wonderful to know how well one can get on, at a pinch, without organs hitherto deemed indispensable to existence. Radiology reveals to us the inner mysteries of the human machine, alive and palpitating. The splintered bone, the bullet or the shell-splinter embedded in the muscle or the osseous structure, can be detected and photographed by the teleradiographic apparatus. The electro-magnet automatically carried out the removal of such fragments, provided only that they are of steel. Ah yes! We are very clever in this twentieth century, reflected the Dop Doctor. Modern Science has even weighed the Soul.

Could Dee and Lilly have bettered that? Debate—consider. . . . This quenchless spark of Being, kindled in Saxham's breast and in yours and mine by the Supreme Will of the Divine Creator—this Ego for whose eternal salvation Christ died upon the bitter Cross, dips the scale at precisely one-sixteenth of an ounce avoirdupois. The expiring man, weighed a moment previously to dissolution, and again immediately afterwards, was found to have lost so much and no more.

The dying world is in the scales to-day, thought Saxham, bitterly and sorrowfully. Religious Faith being the soul of the world, one wonders, when the last thin hymn shall have died upon the fierce irrespirable air; when the last human sigh shall have exhaled from Earth, how much in ponderability shall be lacking to the acorn-shaped lump of whirling matter. Will the result proportionate with the moribund's sixteenth of an ounce?

It seemed to Saxham, that without a moral and social

upheaval upon a vaster scale than historian ever recorded or visionary ever dreamed; a cataclysmic cleansing, a purging as by fire; the regeneration of the human race, the reconstitution of the human mind, the renaissance of the Divine Ideal, could never be brought about. Unconsciously he sought for the decadent world some such ordeal as he himself had passed through. You looked at him and saw the scars of suffering. The soil of his nature had been rent by volcanic convulsions and seared by the upburst of fierce abysmal fires, before the green herb clothed the sides of the frowning steeps, the jagged peaks were wreathed with gentle clouds; the pure springs gathered and ran; the valleys became fruitful and the plains carpeted themselves with flowers.

A miracle had been wrought for Saxham the Man, and he saw the need of one for the World, and said in his heart that, though holy men might pray, it would not, could not, ever be vouchsafed. And all the while the miracle was ripening, the Day was coming, the Great Awakening was at hand.

## CHAPTER XXI

### MARGOT LOOKS IN

It drew on to the luncheon hour. The last patient a very young, very little, very pretty married woman, was summoned by the neat maid from the waiting-room, in a remote corner of which a husband of military type and ordinarily cheerful countenace, remained, maintaining with obvious effort a fictitious interest in the pages of a remote issue of *Punch*.

The dainty little lady bore a name well known to Saxham. The fact that a title was attached to it did not interest him, nor had it shortened her term of waiting by a second of the clock. But her youth smote him with a sense of pity as she took the chair upon his left hand facing the window, and without overmuch embarrassment made clear her case.

She was going to have a baby. Franky, her husband, earnestly desired the kiddie for family reasons, yet its advent was unwelcome to him, in that it must inevitably involve physical pain and mental anxiety for the little lady, Franky's wife.

The little lady had been frightfully downed by the prospect. She rather cottoned to kiddies, she explained, than otherwise. It was the bother of having them that didn't appeal. It put everything in the cart as regarded the Autumn Season. Besides—there were family reasons on her side, why the prospect should not be too rosy. She stated the reasons, and Saxham's listening face grew grave. He realised the danger of a Preconceived Idea.

He said nothing. Margot went on talking. Her beautiful deer-eyes were alternately wistful and coaxing. They entreated sympathy. They begged for gentleness. They

grew brilliant with enthusiasm as she explained that after a lot of chinning, she and Franky had hit upon a perfectly ripping plan.

A friend, recently encountered in Paris, had thrown a ray of hope upon the doubtful prospect. No doubt Dr. Saxham was in sympathy with the pioneers of the New Crusade against Unnecessary Pain. . . . Of course, Dr. Saxham knew all about the wonderful experiments of German gynæwhatdoyoucall'ems. The right term was frightfully crack-jaw. Perhaps Dr. Saxham knew what was meant?

Saxham reassured the little lady.

"You refer of course to the experiments of Professors von Wolfenbüchel of Vienna, and Krauss of the Berlin *Fraüenklinik*, resulting in the method of treatment now known throughout the Continent as 'Purple Dreams.' Wolfenbüchel and Krauss have published a pamphlet on the subject. Perhaps you have read the pamphlet?"

"Yes—I've read it. A wonderful book that has been translated into every language. A German officer, friend of a friend I met in Paris, told her about it. His sister had tried the treatment, and found it A1. So I bought a French translation of the book in Paris, and an English one at a shop in the Haymarket. It's bound in rose-coloured vellum stamped with a rising sun in gold. 'Weep No More, Mothers!' it's called. Isn't that a charming title? And the subject is: 'Pangless Childbirth, Produced through Purple Dreams.'"

In a sweet, coaxing voice that trembled a little, she began to tell the Doctor about the wonderful results obtained by hypodermics of Krauss and Wolfenbüchel's marvellous combination of drugs. And Saxham hearkened with stern patience, while the table-clock ticked and the luncheon hour drew near, and Franky chewed the cud of suspense in the Doctor's waiting-room.

Thousands of peasant women, and others of the lower middle-class in Germany had become mothers under the

Purple Dreams treatment. Maternity Hospitals in Paris, Brussels, and New York had adopted the method after controversy and hesitation. It had triumphed over every doubt. An American woman whose brother's wife had had a "Purple Dreams" baby at the Berlin Institute had told the little narrator only yesterday how quite too wonderful was the discovery of the enlightened Krauss and the gifted Wolfenbüchel. Everything was made easy. When your ordeal drew near you simply went to the place, and signed your name in a book, and put yourself in the hands of skilled persons. You felt no pain—not a twinge. Only the prick and throb of the hypodermic needle-syringe, and most people were used to the *pique* nowadays—administering the first subcutaneous injections of the wonderful new drug. . . Under its mild sedative influence you dozed off to sleep presently. And when you woke up—there was the baby—beautifully dressed, and lying on a lace pillow in the arms of a smartly dressed, fresh-cheeked nurse.

This had been the experience of the sister of the German officer, as of the wife of the brother of the American lady. The same thing happening to thousands everywhere. The philanthropic Wolfenbüchel and the benevolent Krauss had made of the stony Via Dolorosa by which Womanhood attains maternity—a path of soft green turf bordered with fragrant lilies and bestrewn with the perfumed petals of the rose.

She ended Saxham had kept his keen blue eyes steadily upon her during the eloquent recital. Not a hair of his black brows had twitched, not a muscle of his pale face had moved—betraying his urgent inclination to smile. His fine hand, lying upon the blotter near the small black case-book, might have been carved out of ancient Spanish ivory, or yellow-white lava. Now he said:

"There is nothing new nor marvellous about the 'Dreams' method. It is—persistent narcosis obtained from the subcutaneous injections of morphine with the hydrobromide of

hyoscine, another alkaloid obtained from henbane. I have visited not only the Institute at Berlin, but the Rottburg Fraüenklinik—and an establishment of the same type in Paris, and another in Brussels. It is a fact that when a patient awakens from the anæsthesia there is no recollection of anything that has taken place subsequently to the injection of the drug."

"There has been no pain. Absolutely—none whatever!" She spoke with a little, joyful catch in her breath.

"Pardon me," said Saxham. "You labour under a delusion which the rose-coloured pamphlet was not written to dispel. There must have been pain—if there has been childbirth. Perhaps there has been overwhelming pain. Pain manifested by outcries and convulsions—violent struggles—subdued by the attendants and nurses—for the friends and relatives of the patient are rigidly excluded—the patient enters and leaves the Home alone. Two or three days may have vanished in that vacuum which has been created in her memory. Days in which she has been lying—it may be—strapped to the bed in the private ward of the nursing home—her purple, congested face and staring eyes concealed by a mask of wetted linen—her agonies only witnessed by paid attendants whose interests are best served by denial or concealment—supposing anything to have gone wrong?"

The relentless surgeon's hand had torn away the painted curtain. Margot contemplated the grim truth in silence for a moment. Then she found words:

"But nothing ever *does* go wrong. The pink pamphlet says so. My American friend's sister-in-law says so. . . . Thousands of women have had children under scopolo—what's its name? And none of them felt pain—not the slightest. And in every case—in *every* case—there was the baby when they woke up!"

The sweet bird-voice quivered. She had entered the room so full of hope and enthusiasm, and this man with the

piercing eyes and the brusque, direct manner was putting things before her in a way that dashed and damped. Hear him now:

"Yes, there is generally a baby—when it is necessary there should be one. Though the patients who are treated in the free wards of German and Austrian *Kliniks* may not always be scrupulous upon this point. Still, if the treatment can be carried out without undue peril for the mother —and I do not allow this for a single moment—have you not considered the risk for the child?"

Margot had pulled off one long glove. Now she murmured, setting the tip of a little bare, jewelled finger near the corner of a distracting little mouth:

"You consider that it's handicapping the start for—the kiddie?"

The avalanche fell; shocking and freezing and stunning her.

"Ask yourself, Lady Norwater, and do not forget to ask your husband: Will a healthy or a degenerate type of man or woman be eventually reared from an infant in whom the springs of Life have been deliberately poisoned with henbane and morphia—before its entrance into the world?"

She gasped:

"Then it's all U.P.?" She was slangy even in her tragic misery. She sought in her gold vanity-bag and produced the envelope that held the cheque, but Saxham waved it away.

"Pray put that back. . . . Neither from rich nor poor do I accept unearned money. You have not really consulted me. You have asked my opinion upon a course of treatment. And I have given it, for what it is worth. You will go home, and tell your husband that I have talked tosh, and consult another physician."

"No, I won't!" She said it bravely. "I want you to prescribe!"

"If I prescribe," Saxham told her, "you shall certainly

fee me. But you do not need treatment." His eyes smiled though his mouth did not relax its grimness, as he added: "You strike me as being in excellent health."

She owned to feeling "top-hole," first-class, and simply awfully beany! Though, and her dimple faded as she owned it, the thought of what must happen in November took "the gilt off the gingerbread."

"Do not think of what is going to happen in November," Saxham advised her. "Or teach yourself to think of it in the right way." The sense of her childishness and inexperience went home to the sensitive quick beneath the man's hard exterior, as she said to him with an unconsciously appealing accent:

"But how am I to find out what is the right way?"

He had gained upon her confidence. The admission proved it. With infinite tact he began to win yet another woman to drain out her chalice of Motherhood, untinctured with the druggist's nepenthe,—to gain for the race yet another babe unmarred before its birth. For this end no labour was too great for Saxham. A crank you may call him, but that cranks of this type are the leaven of the world, you know.

It is typical of the human butterfly Saxham dealt with, that his clothes pleased Margot. She liked their characteristic mingling of elegance with simplicity. Some fashionable doctors got themselves up like elderly bloods, others affected garments dating from the year One. There was neither perfume upon Saxham's handkerchief nor flue upon his coat-sleeve. His shirt of soft white cashmere, his slightly starched linen cuffs and narrow double collar were fastened with plain buttons of mother o' pearl, the black silk necktie was blameless of pin or ring. The handsome gold chronometer he carried because it had been presented to him by the Staff and patients of St. Teresa and St. Stanislaus. The chain attached to it—rather worn and shabby now—was of woven red-brown hair.

The hair of his wife. A creamy-pale Niphetos rose stood where her hands had placed it near his writing-pad, in a tall, slender beaker of green-and-gold Venetian glass. His eyes drank at the beauty of the lovely scarce-unfolded blossom. Perhaps the resemblance of the fair flower to the beloved giver softened the lines of the stern square face into the smile that Margot liked, as he found her eyes again, saying:

"Perhaps I could better answer your question by telling you how another patient bore herself in—circumstances akin to yours. Will it tire you? I promise not to be unduly prolix. And to listen commits you to no course of action. Now, shall I go on?"

"I'd love you to go on!"

Always in extremes, the little wayward creature. She flushed and sparkled at the Doctor as he took from its place on his writing-table a triptych photograph-frame in gold-mounted mother-o'-pearl, folded the leaves so as to reveal but one of the portraits, and held under Margot's eyes the delicately-tinted photograph of a girl of twenty. The portrait had been taken the year following Saxham's return from South Africa with his young wife.

"How beautiful!" Margot exclaimed.

"Beautiful, as you say, but does she look happy?"

Margot wrinkled her dainty eyebrows, puzzling out the question. Did she look happy, the girl of the portrait, whose face and figure might have served one of the old Greek masters as model for an Artemis to be carved upon a gem? Well, perhaps not quite happy, now one came to look again.

The black-lashed eyes of golden hazel were full of wistful sadness, there was a faintly indicated fold between the fine arched eyebrows, much darker than the rippling red-brown hair, whose luxuriance seemed to weigh down the little Greek head. The closely-folded, deeply-cut lips spoke dumbly of sorrow, the nymph-like bosom seemed rising on a breath of weariness. Something was lacking to complete

her beauty. So much was plain even to Margot. But not until the Doctor showed by the side of the first, the second portrait, did she realise what that Something was.

In the first portrait both face and figure were shown in profile. In the second, bearing a date of two years later, the beautiful, sensitive face of the young woman was turned towards you. Still rather grave than smiling, she held in her arms a sturdy baby boy of some twelve months, upon whose downy head her chin lightly rested. The clasp of her slender arms about her child, the poise of her still nymph-like figure, expressed fulness of life, buoyant energy, and happiness in fullest measure. What was previously lacking was now made clear.

"Lovely, quite lovely!" trilled the sweet little voice. "And what an exquie kiddy!"

"Then you do not dislike children?" Saxham asked, as his visitor's husband had done not long ago.

"On the contrary," the little lady assured him, "I rather cotton to them. But"—she shrugged her little shoulders prettily and quoted boldly from another woman—"but the fag of having them doesn't—appeal!"

The Doctor replaced the threefold frame and turned his regard back upon his visitor.

"These photographs speak for themselves . . ." he said quietly. "She—the mother of the boy you see, was, when she first knew that she was to be a mother, fragile and delicate in body, and in mind highly-strung and sensitive. As a child she had known neglect and unkind usage. Twice she had sustained an overwhelming shock, physical and mental; she had rallied, passed through a crisis and regained lost ground. But the possibility of a relapse was not to be blinked at. It was a lion in the path!"

The slight form of the listener was convulsed by a shudder. The pretty face lost its wild-rose tint. The lion in the path . . . Margot saw him crouching, his tawny eyes aflame, his great jaws slavering, his tail lashing the dust,

his great muscles tightening for the fearful spring. And Saxham went on:

. "She maintained from the first a sweet, sane mental standpoint. She tamed her lion by sheer force of will. Her courage was her own: she did not owe it to the physician and surgeon. But he advised as he knew best, and she followed his advice implicitly, as to wholesome diet and regular exercise, thus keeping her body in health. She surrounded herself with objects that were beautiful in form and colour. She made a point of hearing great music and of re-reading the works of great poets, essayists, and novelists. She wished her child to owe much to pre-natal influences. For that these——"

The speaker faltered for a moment, before he resumed the thread of his discourse.

"—That these form character for good or evil no physiologist can deny. Therefore while she did not flee from, she avoided the sight of deformity or ugliness, as she shunned active infection, or tainted air. It was desirable that her child should be healthy, strong, and beautiful. But the love of loveliness, though one of the dominants of her character, scales lowest of the triad. Human love, the love of mother, husband, and friend rank above it, and first of all stands the love of God."

"How awfully good she must be!"

"She took the child, first and last, as a gift from God to her. If she lived or died, and she longed inexpressibly to live—Death, like Life, would be the fulfilment of the Divine Will. Fortified by the Sacraments of her Church she lay down upon her bed of pain as though it were an altar. She suffered intensely——"

His voice broke.

"She suffered inexpressibly. Not until the actual crisis did I have recourse to chloroform. When I was about to use it she said to me: '*Not yet! . . . I will wear it a little longer. . . this mother's crown of thorns.*'

To-day the crown is one of roses. Does not this appeal to you?"

The Doctor's supple hand displayed the third portrait in the triptych, and Margot saw the same assured joy, rounded with a richer and more deep content. The exquisite face was fuller, the outlines of the form displayed the ripeness of early maturity, the slender palm was now a stately tree. The girl of twenty was merged in the woman of thirty, rich in all feminine graces, beautiful exceedingly, with the beauty that is not only of line and proportion, form and colour, but shines from within, irradiating the perishable living clay with the immortal radiance of the soul. Her boy stood at her side, a manly square-headed young British twelve-year-old, wearing a simple, distinctive dress, familiar to us all.

"Y-yes. But I'm afraid you have forgotten: I told you at the beginning, or I meant to. . . . My—my own mother died when I was born!"

"And that sad fact increases your natural fear and repugnance. Naturally. It will strike you as a curious point of resemblance between your case and that of the—patient whose portrait I have shown you, when I tell you that her mother did not survive the birth of a later child. May I tell you further that the possibility of some inherited weakness does not render you more promising—regarded as a subject for the treatment of Wolfenbüchel and Krauss."

Margot was beginning to hate this stern-faced man who set forth things so clearly. He had bored her almost to weeping. Why on earth had she come? The fact that Franky's sister Trix's boy Ronald had been helped into the world by Saxham thirteen years ago and recently operated on for the removal of the appendix, was no reason that Franky's wife should regard him as infallible. She glanced at her tiny jewelled wrist-watch. Ten whole minutes had gone. She rose.

"You have been so kind, and I have been so much

interested. But I must go now!" she said, like a weary child pleading to be let out of school. "Franky—my husband—will be waiting. I have promised to lunch with him at the Club."

"If he is here, perhaps Lord Norwater would like to speak to me," Saxham suggested.

Margot lied badly. She reddened as she answered:

"Oh, what a pity that he did not come!"

## CHAPTER XXII

### MARGOT IS SQUARE

She was in what she would have termed "a blue funk" for fear that Saxham would accompany her to the threshold. But he merely bowed her out of the consulting-room and smartly shut his door. Then she tripped to the waiting-room and beckoned forth Franky with an air of buoyant, fictitious cheerfulness. Her eyes were radiant, her little face was dressed in artful smiles. . . .

"Did I seem long? Were you getting the hump?" she asked of Franky, who rose and hurried to meet her, dropping *Punches* all over the place. His smooth hair was almost rumpled and his brown eyes begged like a retriever's. He asked in the kind of whisper that travels miles:

"Yes—no! Did you pull off the interview? What does the Doctor——"

"S-sh!" She glanced anxiously towards the one remaining patient. "Tell you when we get out. Impossible here!"

He urged: "But is it all right?"

"As right as rain!"

"Good egg!" She had got him out of the room and as far as the hall door. "Stop! . . . Wait! Oughtn't I to go and thank——"

"No—no!" The door was open, the neat little landau-limousine that had brought them was waiting by the kerbstone. Before Franky knew it, Margot had plucked him down the steps, pulled him into the car, and given the chauffeur the signal. They were in Hanover Square before he recovered his breath.

"Oh come, I say, Kittums! That sort of Sandow busi-

ness can't be good for you. Why you're in such a thundering hurry to get me away, I'd rather like to know?"

Her heart shook her, but she lied again bravely.

"Didn't you want to hear what the Doctor told me about the 'Purple Dreams' treatment?"

"More than anything in the world. That drug with the freak name! . . . Can it do any harm—to you and——"

"Not a scrap!"

She planted a flying kiss between his ear and his collar. He greatly appreciated the attention, though it tickled him horribly.

"Dr. Saxham said it was a frightfully clever, practicable method. Absolutely harmless, and the patient doesn't suffer—not that much!" She measured off an infinitesimal bit of finger-nail and showed him, and went on as he caught the little hand and gratefully mumbled it: "You don't know a thing that happens. You simply go to bye-bye. And—there's always the baby when you wake up!"

"A first-class baby?" His harping maddened her. "A healthy little buffer to send to Eton and represent us in the Regiment, and inherit the title presently when his poor old Pater pops? Just look me in the face like the little sport you are, Margot, and tell me that you're playing square with me. For this—for this is the game of Life!"

He had both her hands. He made her look at him. She met his eager stare with limpid eyes. And all the while that sentence of Saxham's about the pre-natal poisoning of the springs of existence, drummed, drummed at the back of her brain. "*What a little beast I am!*" she mentally commented, hearing her own voice answering:

"I've told you No, and that I am playing square with you!" She grasped the fact that Franky had suffered, by the grunt of relief with which he loosed her hands. "And so it's settled I go to Berlin about the middle of—September, say?"

"Wow-wow! It's us for the gay life! Just when the

beastly hole's as dusty as the Sahara and as hot as hell!"

"You won't be in the beastly hole, and perhaps I needn't go before the beginning of October. You can go down to Brakehills and slay away at the pheasants, and run over when I cable, to bring me back——"

"With my boy! Our boy, Kittums!"

His simple, kind face was quivering. He put out a strong brown hand and laid it on hers, and she gave the hand a little affectionate nip:

"Hullo!" Perhaps he talked on to cover up the momentary lapse into sentiment. "Pipe old St. George's, where we did the deed! Hardly seems close on six months since we got spliced, does it? And there's the Bijou Cottage. . . ." Franky thus irreverently designated the large, drab, stucco-faced, eminently respectable if mousey mansion on the Square's east side, where Margot's bachelor Uncle Derek lived with his collection of moths and beetles. "Shall we stop and give the old gentleman a cheero? Is he at all likely to be in?"

His hand was on the silk-netted rubber bulb of the chauffeur's whistle, when Margot caught it back.

"No, don't stop! Of course he's in. He never goes out, unless it is to a meeting of the Entomological Society, or the Museum of Natural History, or some other place equally stuffy and scientific. Besides, Uncle Derek is a vegetarian —and there wouldn't be anything but tomato soup, and pea-flour cutlets, and Lepidoptera for lunch!"

"Poor little woman, was she peckish, then? All lity, we'll chuff along and fill up tanks at the Club. Bally odd bill of fare, pea-flour cutlets and Lepidop—what's-their-names? But we'll get things nearly as rummy served up to us in Berlin. Pork chops with sweet gooseberry sauce, and pink sausages with lilac cabbage and dumplings. Why do you look so scared?"

She forced a laugh.

"Not scared, but you said '*we*' . . ."

"You don't suppose I could go shooting when you were—facing what you've got to face?" he asked her, and added, in a tone and with a look that she had once before encountered from him: "When you go to Berlin in October, Kittums, I go with you; take that as straight from Headquarters, old child! Unless—something happens to prevent our going there at all!"

He added, answering the mute question in her eyes:

"Something that's been on the cards since the Anglo-French Agreement of 1904. It cropped up again in 1905, when the German Kaiser's feelings were so upset by John Bull's carryings-on with the pretty lady in the tricolour petticoat and Cap of Liberty, that he called on the Sultan of Morocco at Tangier to ask his Sublimity to interfere. And again in 1908 we were up against it . . . when Austria annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Russia took the needle, and William ordered out his best suit of shining armour in readiness for a scrap. . . . If there's anything in the Triple Entente, the fat was nearly in the fire then. . . . And again in 1911, over the French occupation of Morocco, when the German gunboat *Panther* and the German cruiser *Berlin* were sent to the closed Fort of Agadir near the mouth of the smelly River Sus. That piffed out after a good deal of what they call 'acute tension between the Powers.' To the Services acute tension means the stoppin' of leave. And I'd fixed things up for spendin' the July fortnight before Henley with some jolly people at Baden-Baden, and if the trip had come off, the chances are I'd have come back engaged to another girl!"

"Are you sorry?"

"Do I look sorry?" was the quick *riposte*. He went on: "France and Germany went in for 'precautionary measures' that time. Precautionary measures mean concentration of troops on both frontiers, and General Manœuvres on the biggest scale. Dress-rehearsal for a general mobilisation,

you tumble? While our Home Fleet quietly concentrated on our north-east coast. And just when the lid seemed on the point of being taken off, Billiam the Bumptious climbed down, and withdrew from Agadir. The squabble was patched up. France got a free hand in Morocco in return for the open door and 100,000 square miles of the Congo Basin. French and German troops left off mugging at one another across the frontiers. Whitehall Wireless, Nordeich Station, and the Eiffel Tower emitted radios reversin' the weather-signals from 10 to 0, which means a dead calm. And the British Fleet gave up all hope and went home to bed.

"But—and don't you swipe in, Kittums, for I'm gettin' to the thrillin' part—the bigwigs who manage Foreign Affairs weren't taken in so easily. They knew the bad blood had got to break out somewhere, and it did. Italy and Turkey went to war in November, 1911, and the Balkan Rumpus broke out ten months later. Turkey didn't win, though her Army has had German instructors ever since von Moltke licked it into shape in 1835, and Germany'd naturally expected her to finish as top-dog. So the concessions Germany wanted from Turkey were lost. I rather think the Prussian Eagle had its eye on Adrianople on the Black Sea coast, and the Gallipoli Peninsula, for the furtherin' of her views on the Near East—and Austria had a fancy for the Sanjak of Novibazar—and wanted Salonika as a base for operations on the Mediterranean. Anyhow, both of 'em were wiped on the jaw. And William the All Too Knowing, as Courtley calls him—Courtley's going in strong for Nietzsche just now—says his works are a slogging attack on Teutonism!—William has got to the end of his patience. The shining armour's been hanging up all these years, getting too tight for an Emperor inclined to run to tummy. The shining sword was getting rusty in its regulation sheath. And then in the nick of time—happens the Affair of Sarajevo. The news came through that Sunday in Paris. I

remember how Spitz's Restaurant boiled over, and the people were shouting 'Sarajevo' on the boulevards. By George! I forgot you were in bed and asleep while we were dining."

Margot, between waking and sleeping, had got some inkling of the tragedy of that night. She asked, as Franky took off his hat and proceeded to mop his non-intellectual forehead:

"And is Sarajevo likely to stop me from going to Berlin?"

Franky left off mopping and said, looking at her squarely:

"If Austria's Note to Serbia is—what the Kaiser would like it to be—you may take it we're on the giddy verge of a General All-Round Scrap."

"You mean—a war?"

"I mean *the* War that'll dwarf all others by comparison. The War of Nations, that the prophet wrote of in Revelations. Armageddon. . . . The Last Battle. The Big Bust Up that comes before the end."

"Darling old boy, what rot!"

"Rot if you like. You wait and see what happens. D'you pipe me tipping you the gag Asquithian?" He grinned at the idea.

"Franky, you've set me asking myself something."

"Why you've married an idiot? . . . Is that it?" He turned upon her a rueful face from which the grin had been wiped away.

Margot said, as the car turned smoothly into Short Street and stopped before the Club portico:

"No, but—How is it you know—all the things you know, when I've always known you knew nothing about anything?"

He shook his head.

"Give it up! . . . No, I don't! The answer is—I'm one of those fellows—and the Services are simply stiff with 'em, who are absolute asses till it's necessary for 'em to be something else."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### A MODERN CLUB

PERHAPS in those prehistoric days before the War, you knew the big, cool, ground-floor dining-room of the "Ladies' Social" Club. They lunched excellently at Margot's pet table in the corner near the conservatory, between whose rows of well-tended pot-plants you pass to the smoke-room, celebrated for its Persian divan, and green-and-rose-coloured glass dome.

Soon the Club would be abandoned to sweeps, painters, charwomen, and window-cleaners. Just now everything was in full swing. As the little tables became vacant, the drawing-rooms and lounges filled up. The smoke-room was a crush of well got-up men and extravagantly-caparisoned women, chattering nineteen to the dozen under a thick blue canopy of Turkish, Egyptian, and Virginian. The tang of Kümmel and Benedictine and Crème de Menthe came to you with the fragrance of the Club's especial coffee and the reek of innumerable illusion perfumes.

People were having a cigarette and a gossip before going on to Lord's to see the tennis-singles between Oxford and Cambridge; or the Inter-Regimental Polo Finals at Hurlingham. Others had just motored back from witnessing the rowing-matches at Henley, between Eton and Darley, and the Eton second Eight and Montbeau College, and were recuperating before dropping in for a whiff of the new comedy at the Ambassador's, or the latest revue at the Fleur de Lis. To be followed by Tango Tea at the Rocroy, or Unlimited Bridge at the house of an accommodating friend.

Perhaps you can recall them—those men and women of

the best and bluest blood in Britain, strenuously spending their days in doing nothing as expensively as ever it could be done. Light, frivolous, shallow, dry-hearted; restlessly seeking new things on which to waste their barren energies, they seemed, and bore out their seeming in all thoroughness; the degenerate sons and daughters of a once great and splendid race.

Save Vanity and the Pride of Life there seemed but little in Eve or Adam. Not overmuch grey brain-matter appeared to be contained within their small neat skulls. Though in comparison with the modern Eve, slangy, loud, extravagantly attired in every tint of the Teutonic dye-chemist's chromatic register, topped with feathers that missed the ceiling by a bare half-foot, Adam in his neutral greys, and buffs and browns, and umbers, struck you as a being of mild demeanour and uncostly apparel, until looking closer, you found him out.

His nice hair was gummed about his head as sleekly as a golliwog's. He sported stays, for the preservation of his silhouette. His gossamer cambric exhaled perfumes like a Georgian dandy's. Fashionable complexion-creams lent his tanned and well-shaved cheek a tempting peachiness. His socks were all too lovely for description by this feeble pen of mine. The uppers of his boots were of every imaginable material and substance, ranging from silk brocade, green lizard, and ivory-white shark skin, to sandy-pink armadillo-belly, or the tender grey of the African gazelle.

The results of the Olympic Games of 1912 must have made dour reading for the fathers of these youthful Britons, remembering their own triumphs in the early eighties. A bitter pill for those stark old men, their grandfathers, makers of 'Varsity records in '61 and '67, whose faith in the superiority of British lungs and muscles had been bequeathed them by their own sires. Yet their juniors took it calmly. They carried the stigma of inferiority with cheerful indifference. Even while holding it the thing best

worth living for—they placidly submitted to be outclassed in sport.

And both the man and the woman of this era were possessed by strange crazes and pleased with vivid contrasts. The musical jig-saw puzzles of Lertes, Hein, and de Blonc vied in their favour with the weird Oriental Operas of the Russian Rimsky-Korsakov and the delicate rhapsodies of Delius, and the sylvan nymphs and fauns of Russian Ballet shared their plaudits with Señora Panchita and Herr Maxi Zuchs, the celebrated exponents of the Tango.

Ah, yes, it was an extraordinary era. Slips from that old, old Tree that bore the Forbidden Fruit had been successfully grafted upon so many old-world stocks in British orchards, that you caught a tang of its exotic flavour in almost everything. Play ran high. Luxury ran riot. Period Balls and Upas Club Cabaret Suppers were IT—absolutely IT. Morality was at lowest ebb—Religion a forgotten formulary. And as the Christian virtues cheapened, so the prices of dress, jewellery, motor-cars, and other indispensables of modern existence climbed to still more amazing altitudes. The marvel was, because nobody seemed to have any money—where the money came from to pay for these things? What we are yet to pay for the wholesale levelling of moral barriers, and the abolition of old-world modesty and good taste, that distinguished the years of ill-fame 1913 and 1914, only Heaven knows.

Even more comprehensively pervasive than the illusion perfumes extracted from coal-tar by German chemists, and supplied us by German manufacturers; even more striking than the dazzling, vivid aniline dyes, procured from the same source, even more potent than the vast array of by-product drugs which represent as it were the scum of the insulated vats wherein the Teuton chemist macerates and mingles his high explosives—was the strange, mysteriously pervasive flavour, the seductively-suggestive tang of evil in the social atmosphere. You caught the look of secret,

intimate, half-cynical knowledge in the faces not only of the merest youths, but of the youngest, freshest, prettiest girls. Subjects held unmentionable a few years ago were openly discussed in English drawing-rooms. Curious lore in strange things old and new was much sought after at this period, when Cubism and Futurism governed design, not only in dress and stage scenery, but in Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture; and dances known in the voodoo-houses of East Africa and the West Indies, and the hells of Central America and the Argentine were seen in the ball-rooms as in the brothels, of Paris and London, Petrograd and Brussels, Vienna, New York, and Berlin.

Novelty was so much the rage, that if the Arch-Enemy of Mankind had appeared among the exclusive patrons of a fashionable night-club in any one of these cities, a hearty welcome would have been extended to him, and his ripe experience would have been laid under contribution with a view to imparting to the latest Cabaret entertainment some exotic novelty from Hell.

Franky with obtrusive care selected a comfortable corner of the Persian divan for Margot, and while she signed for coffee and Kümmel, established himself at her side.

They were isolated, it seemed to Kittums. Friends nodded and smiled cordially, but did not attempt to join them. Was it because Franky's too-possessive manner had told secrets? . . . She shivered and glanced at her lord. He said, as the light-footed button-boys scoured about with coffee and liqueur-trays, while the electric fans purred, the blue smoke-canopy thickened under the green and rose glass dome, and the clamour of many feminine voices, in combination with the gaudy feathers of the clamourers, suggested the South American macaw-house at the Zoo:

"My eye! you're pretty thick in here. Might be a fog in mid-Channel." He mounted a square monocle recently

purchased in Paris and the pride of his bosom, threw back his head and stared up into the famous green and rose dome. "Swagger affair. How much did it tot up to?"

"Seventeen hundred, clear, with the carpet and the divan."

"Pretty stiff!" His doleful whistle set Margot's teeth on edge. She added:

"And rattling cheap at the price! And—if it wasn't, I was spending my own money. . . . There was nobody—*then*—to interfere!"

He conceded:

"Of course I don't suggest that you were done in the eye. Probably you got the value of your dibs. But you'll have something better to spend cash on presently. Me, too! We must both draw in our horns now, Kittums. For the sake of—you know who! . . . Hullo! Is anything wrong?"

She had winced, but she gritted her little teeth, and fought back the rising hysteria. She could have shrieked, or thrown the little coffee-pot at his head. He went on, recognising friends through the smoke-haze:

"There's Lady Beau with that German aviator-chap we met in Paris. Big red-headed brute. You remember him? And—who's the girl? But for her hair, I'd say it was Miss Saxham. By the Great Brass Hat, it is! With a wig, or dyed. . . ."

"Dyed. It was done in Paris—done most beautifully." Margot's eyes had lighted up with interest. "I must have forgotten to tell you. I've known it three or four days. Don't you like it?"

"Like it?" Franky had reached for his little glass and gulped the contents hurriedly. "My stars, I never saw such a transformation. Order another Kümmel, please, to give me a buck-up."

"Take mine. I simply loathe the sticky stuff." She added, as Franky obliged: "*I* think that Pat looks ripping."

"All too ripping. That's where the trouble comes in." He went on: "When her hair was black, you knew where it was you'd seen her. Makin' one in an endless procession of women—all with long eyes and big busts and curving hips, walkin'—like pussy-cats along a roof-ridge, on the walls of those old Egyptian temples we did together—that November when I got such spoons on you—going up with the Gillinghams from Cairo to Philae—a flat-bottomed Nile tug towin' the whole crowd in a string of dahabeahs. You remember those ochre-coloured Nile sunrises? When a dust-storm had been blowin' over the Desert, and the River was all wrinkly white, like curdled milk."

"How killingly poetic!"

"Am I poetic? Good egg! Never thought I'd live to be called that."

"Live and learn!" Margot's laugh was a hard little silvery tinkle. She too was remembering the sunrises and sunsets of Egypt, and the long days under the green canvas awnings. How beautiful she had thought the brown eyes that seemed only vacuous now. She, Margot, would be ugly very soon now, she told herself. Already her small face showed lines and hollows. Soon beauty-loving men and women would turn their eyes away. . . . Her cheval-glass would tell her why, and shop-windows when she passed them would reveal her shapelessness. She would only possess interest for three people. For the doctor, as a patient. For the certificated nurse, as a Case. For her husband, as the potential mother of the boy he longed for. And—what price Margot?

"Should you like me to take you to see some polo, or wouldn't a chuff-chuff in the country be best?" Franky's eyes were full of hungry solicitude as they rested on the small, pinched features. "You look a bit fagged, it strikes me!"

She nipped her little lower lip, stung by the tone of sympathetic proprietorship. "Oh! very well. A drive!" she

told him, and they passed together from the smoking-room. The sheath-skirt revealed, as she moved, what she would have hidden. Von Herrnung smiled, following the little figure with bold, curious glances. Other men stared, if more discreetly. Towering feathers nodded to each other as their feminine wearers commented:

"Poor little Margot, how quite too rough on her!"

Said Lady Beauvayse, assuming the rip-saw Yankee accent in which it pleased her to deliver her witticisms:

"Say now! if we women could pick babies right away off the strawberry-vines, it would save a deal of trouble, and a considerable pile of self-respect."

Everybody laughed. A slender white and golden woman with a string of sapphires very much the colour of her own eyes, picked up a toy Pekingese that squatted near her, and said, cuddling the goggling morsel under her chin:

"I agree. When I look at my two precious duckies I say to myself: 'You little dears, for each of your sweet sakes I became a plain woman with a shapeless silhouette and saucer-eyes. Now that I've done my duty to your pappy and Posterity, this is the only kind of baby I'll indulge in." She kissed the Pekingese on the end of its black snub-nose. "And when I want a new one—I'll buy it at the shop!"

"*Noch besser.* Why not hire one? . . ." suggested von Herrnung.

Mrs. Charterhouse laughed and gave him the Pekingese to hold. But it snapped at him furiously and she took the little beast back again.

"Dogs do not like me," said the big German. "You will read perhaps in novels that that is a bad sign, yes?"

"I never read novels," returned Mrs. Charterhouse, with her famous manner, "nor any books, only bits of the papers for the Sporting and Society news. And Reports of Divorce Proceedings, and the Notices in Bankruptcy. One likes to know what one's friends are doing, and where they are to be found. Don't you, Count? Not that there is any

great difficulty in ascertaining your whereabouts, just now, I fancy. . . . Why, what has become of Patrine?"

"Miss Saxham went in there just now to write a letter," said the smiling von Herrnung, pointing to the leather-covered swing-doors communicating with the writing-room. "She comes now, I think! Yes, it is she!" He rose with his air of exaggerated courtesy as the tall figure of Patrine Saxham returned through the swing-doors and re-crossed the room. She carried her head high, and had a letter in her hand. The alteration in the colour of her hair made her whiteness almost startling. There were bluish shadows about her long eyes, and her rounded cheeks had lost a little of their fulness, but her beauty had never been more apparent than now.

"She has dyed, therefore she is dead to me!" groaned Courtley, who was, as usual, in attendance on Lady Beauvayse. He added, plaintively: "It's like—white-washing the Sphinx, or enamelling a first-class battle-cruiser in some fashionable colour. Why did you let her do it, my lady fair?"

Lady Beauvayse retorted:

"Am I Miss Saxham's mother that I should meddle in her love-affairs?"

"If I was acquainted with her mother," said Courtley, below his breath, "and thought the good lady would take my tip seriously, I'd step in and nip this affair in the bud. It's no go, even if Miss Saxham thinks it is. It's a dud. That German flying-chap is booked to marry a cousin; a Baroness Something von Wolfensbragen-Hirschenbuttel. I've seen it in the Berlin *Lokal Anzeiger*, and that's inspired, a sort of Imperial Court Almanac. And even if it wasn't true, there are reasons—" His kind grey eyes were worried, he tugged at his pointed black beard in a vexed way. "Take me seriously, Miladi, tell her what I've told you, before it's too late!"

"And bring on myself the fate of the interferer. . . .

Couldn't you—since you're so anxious?" Lady Beauvayse began.

"Not possible," said Courtley. "Too crushed with responsibilities. Got to brush up my seamanship, while my junior executive swots away in Docks at Chatham, fillin' in the watch-bill and making out commissioning-cards."

"You've got a ship, do you mean?"

Courtley nodded.

"They call her one at the Admiralty just by way of being funny. When they've scraped off the dirt enough to get at her, she may turn out to be a first-class protected cruiser. Twenty months out of commission—and mobilised for the Spithead Naval Review."

"Ought one to be glad? . . . Does it mean that we're to congratulate you on promotion?" asked puzzled Lady Beauvayse.

"Well," Courtley admitted cautiously, "when I've got my full-dress frock-coat and sword out of pawn, and hoisted my pennant and called on the post Commander-in-Chief—I shall be something between a Rear-Admiral and a Post Captain—or they'll have told me wrong."

"And the Review—what do you call it?" persisted Lady Beauvayse. "Can one go and see it—whenever it comes off?"

"It'll be big enough to see—with a stiffish pair of binkies," admitted Courtley in his gentlest manner; "and the newspapers seem to have arranged it for somewhere in the middle of the month. As to what you're to call it—if you called it an Object Lesson on the biggest scale for the use of German Kultur Classes, perhaps you wouldn't be very wide of the bull."

He got up before Lady Beauvayse could rejoin, and had met Patrine, and engineered her into his vacated seat next her friend upon the divan almost before she knew. She lowered her tall person upon the cushions, studiously avoiding von Herrnung's glances. She wore a white

embroidered gown of cobwebby material and extreme scantiness, a stole of black cock's feathers was looped about her shoulders, and on her dead beech-leaf-coloured hair sat a curious little hat of glittering silver spangles, from which sprang a single black cock's plume.

"What have you all been talking about?" she asked, looking about her.

Lady Wastwood, who sat near, answered, balancing her long, slim, fragile personality on the fender-stool before the hearth that was filled with tall ferns and flowering plants in pots:

"We were saying—what a wretched pity the process of racial reproduction is so abominably unbecoming. It really points to a loose style of reasoning on the part of Nature—or whoever it is who arranges these things!"

Who does not know Lady Wastwood. She affected, at this period, a skull-cap of gold-green hair and a triangular chalk-white face, with a V-shaped mouth, painted scarlet as a Pierrot's. Her eyebrows were black and resembled musical slurs. Through her few diaphanous garments you could have counted every bone of her frail person, so light that it was a favourite vacation joke with her eldest boy —who was now at Sandhurst qualifying for a Cavalry Commission—to sprint with his widowed mother on his shoulder up and down corridors and stairs.

Listen to Trixie:

"I suppose—Nature. She's so unreasonable—that must be why she's a she, in literature. She implanted in us poor women the raging desire to be pretty under all imaginable circumstances. . . . At the same time she says to us: 'You're immoral, unnatural, and selfish, if you don't replenish the Race. Go and do it!' Consequently, when one is ordered in that bullying way to choose between immorality and ugliness, one calls out: 'Oh! do let me be pretty, please!'"

A soldierly, good-looking man, sitting with a charming girl in a particularly smoky corner, lazily propounded:

"Why do women covet prettiness beyond everything?"

"To please men, I rather surmise," said Lady Beauvayse, turning her Romney head in the direction of the speaker, who queried:

"Ah! but why do women want to please men?"

"I can answer that," interrupted Mrs. Charterhouse. "Because she who pleases is perfectly sure of having a gorgeous time."

"It has been said by some inspired idiot," lisped Lady Wastwood "that women make themselves beautiful for the sake of their own sex. Give us your opinion on this question, Count von Herrnung. Did I put on this perfectly devey frock for Miss Saxham, or for you?"

"*Gnädige Gräfin*, for neither myself nor Miss Saxham. For your own pleasure," said von Herrnung, "have you joy in making yourself beautiful."

"You feel like that when your tailor has done you particularly well?" asked Lady Wastwood, wickedly, looking down her long, thin nose to hide the sparks of humour in her eyes. Half a dozen pairs of ears were cocked to catch the answer, in which von Herrnung's characteristic lack of humour showed.

"Gracious Countess, certainly. It is *prachtvoll* for a cultured man to study and develop his physical advantages. To please women," he made his little insolent bow, "who adore Beauty, and for the sake of ingratiating oneself with men. But above all for one's own sake. For ugliness is despicable," said von Herrnung. His florid face paled, his hard blue eyes dilated, he shivered as he spoke with uncontrollable disgust. "It is—*niedrig!* There is no other word! No longer to be beautiful and strong—that would be horrible! There are many ugly accidents in our German Flying Service. Thus far I have escaped disfigurement.

But when my time comes I shall take care to be killed outright. Better to die than to be made hideous!"

"Did you hear?" said the man in the distant corner to the charming girl who shared it with him. "The fellow's dead in earnest. And he is uncommonly good-looking, though I don't care about the German Service type of man myself. Don't like their clothes, don't like their jewellery, don't like their tone when they're talking to women, and simply loathe it when they're talking to me!"

"It's a case of Doctor Fell," said his pretty friend. "Now *I* should admire him—if he admired himself a little less, and his valet or somebody with influence over him could persuade him to cut that awful thumb-nail. No, you can't see it now. He's wearing a glove on his left hand. But it can't be under two inches long."

"Queer kind of freak for a Twentieth Centurion," said the man contemptuously. "All very well for the Imperial Court of China, or a Stone Age make-up for a Covent Garden Fancy Ball. But for a London drawin'-room in the year 1914 it is a little off the bull. We must approach Miss Saxham in the matter of cutting it. She appears to be the Ruling Star."

His friend glanced across at the big knot of people gathered near the ferny fireplace.

"They go about together a good deal, and he does stare at her in rather a possessive style. She's so awfully good to look at, isn't she?"

"She is; but she isn't quite so good for you to know!"

"Why?"

"Could we drop the subject? I'll say why later. Let's scoot now! With luck, we could nip in for the end of the second act of 'The Filberts' at Ryley's Theatre, and see Jimmy Griggson do 'The Dance of the Varalette.'"

And they rose and sauntered away in search of entertainment, leaving Cynthia Charterhouse drawing out von Herrnung, who seemed in a particularly arrogant mood.

Did he like England and London especially? Did he find English women as nice, generally, as the friends he had left at home?

"Nice. . . . One is charmed with English ladies!" declared von Herrnung. "So tall, willowy, and elegant, so independent of manner, and so amiably ready to make a stranger feel at home! True, they have not the plumpness and repose of our German ladies . . . at the theatres especially they are rather thin than otherwise. . . . But they have *gehen* and *chic*"—he showed his white teeth—"and change is a delightful thing!"

Patrine, silent in her settee-corner, wondered whether Trixie Wastwood and Cynthia Charterhouse knew that he was insulting them?

"Change from a fat woman to a thin one, is that what you mean?" asked Mrs. Charterhouse. She added: "I'm so glad we strike you as having lots of go. Perhaps it's a result of our being given to exercise, that general effect of slimness you mention. But if German women don't walk, or ride, or skate, or fence, or swim, they do dance a great deal."

"They dance a great deal, yes!" agreed von Herrnung. "One might say they are passionately devoted to it. Dancing is also one of the chief joys of a German officer's life—when he has handsome partners to choose amongst!" He added: "When one is young, and the blood runs hot in the veins, what more glowing pleasures can Life offer, than to ride a noble horse, to drink glorious wine, or to dance all night with a beautiful woman, to the sound of music voluptuous and exquisite!"

Patrine, behind the shelter of a copy of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, was shuddering uncontrollably. Her life seemed driven back from the extremities to centre about her heart. In that and in her brain were glowing cores of fire. All else was ice, rigid and heavy and cold.

"Dear me!" came plaintively from Mrs. Charterhouse.

She signalled with her eyebrows to Lady Wastwood and continued, as the diaphanous Trixie came drifting to her assistance: "Really, I shall have to seek a delightful change by going to Germany. I'd quite forgotten how different you are! The way you talk about your blood, and all that. It's simply too awfully interesting! Trixie, you've got to listen to this!"

"I need no telling, I assure you. I have been drinking in Count von Herrnung's eloquence at every pore," affirmed Trixie. She added: "Like you I have been deeply intrigued by his descriptions of his countrymen. So, *so* different from our poor creatures, who don't drink glorious wine because they funk gouty complications, and leave their noble horses eating their heads off in loose-boxes while they're scorching about the country in racing-cars. And as for dancing all night—" She shrugged her frail shoulders, and elevated her Pierrot eyebrows beneath the veil that tightly swathed her white triangular face.

"Doesn't it fire you to go to Germany?" gushed Mrs. Charterhouse. "Why"—she demanded, raising her fine eyes to the genuine Adam ceiling—"why can't my husband get a post in the Berlin Diplomatic, instead of stupid old Petersburg? One never *dreamed* Germans could be so interesting before!"

"We are interesting, yes!" blandly agreed von Herrnung. He lighted a fresh cigarette, balanced his magnificent person upon an inlaid Oriental chess-stool, folded his huge arms upon his broad breast, and turned upon Trixie and the impressionable Cynthia the batteries of his superb blue eyes. "*Es mag wohl sein*—it may possibly be because the Englishman is a human machine—a cold and formal, if intelligent being; while the German is a child of Nature, whatever his calling may be. His bounding pulses throb under the official or military uniform as though it were a fawn-skin worn by a young satyr. He can sing. He can revel. He can enjoy. He can love——"

"He can love! Now you're getting really quite too interesting!" Mrs. Charterhouse exclaimed in seeming ecstasy: "Do go on, Count. Pray, pray tell us how German officers love!"

"Yet this exuberance, and seeming-careless child-likeness," pursued von Herrnung, "co-exists in the representative male of our glorious German nation with an energy which is pitilessly indomitable, and a hardness like that of diamond, or of the metal of the Hammer of Thor. Scratch the child, joyous and voluptuous"—the ladies nodded to each other delightedly at this second reference to voluptuousness—"you will find beneath its rosy skin the German Superman. *Gnädige Gräfin*, may I give you a cigarette?" He pulled out a massive silver-gilt case, and offered it to Lady Wastwood, who had thrown away the end of a tiny Péra.

"Thanks," said the lady, "but it might turn out a super-cigarette and disagree with me. How astonishingly well-informed you Germans are upon the subject of yourselves! I've met heaps of your countrymen whom the subject seemed perfectly to obsess. I suppose they begin to teach you at a very early age, don't they? Don't you suppose they would, Cynthia dear?"

Mrs. Charterhouse agreed.

"Of course. But I wonder if that sort of—might one call it—intensive culture?—can be good for you?" With her charming head on one side she regarded von Herrnung pensively. "Don't you *sometimes* get fed up with yourselves? One would somehow suppose you would! Like the East End Board School children whose mother had to write to the Fifth Standard teacher to ask her not to tell Hemma and 'Arriet any more nasty things about their insides."

Courtley and Lady Beauvayse, who under cover of a separate conversation had been listening, were seized with simultaneous attacks of coughing, rose and escaped from the smoking-room. Patrine Saxham remained, seeming to

study the newspaper she had picked up. But only a confused jumble of letters, big and little, danced up and down the columns she held before her eyes.

And yet there were lines scattered here and there throughout the newspapers, that boded ill for the peace of the world. How little we dreamed of what was coming while crowded London audiences applauded Jimmy Greggson in the "Dance of the Varalette." The River was ablaze with multi-coloured sweaters, vast crowds planked their gate-money to witness cricket-matches, lawn-tennis and polo-matches, Flying contests, and bouts between International champions at the ancient game of fisticuffs.

Even while the handsome young French heavy-weight Carpentier was whacking the Yankee Smith at Olympia, white-faced, weary-eyed men of great affairs were spending the hot hours of the July days and nights—*minus* a stray half-hour for a meal and a snatched eyeful of sleep now and then—in reading reports in cipher sent by lesser men, agents of the Secret Intelligence Department—who were registered as numbers and owned no names.

These told of vast preparations long complete, and terrible designs perfect and perfecting. Poison-fruit, grown and matured in shade, now bursting-ripe and ready to kill. The aerials thrilled, the long waves travelled through invisible ether, carrying the despatches for the weary-eyed men.

The despatches were not all in cipher. Thus little polyglot employés, youthful radiotelegraphic operators in charge of ship-stations in Territorial or foreign waters, or Wireless posts quite recently established on foreign frontiers, found themselves sharers in the secret councils of Ambassadors, Emperors, Kings, and Presidents.

In their ear-pieces such words as "situation," "utmost gravity," "friction avoided," "Triple Alliance," and "Triple Entente," were repeated over and over. To them the tuned spark sang what the Tsar was saying to his

Cousin of Great Britain and the Dominions overseas. They heard the British Foreign Secretary talking from Downing Street to the British Ambassador at Berlin, and the British Ambassador at Paris, and the French President, on a visit to Tsarskoe Selo, replying to *communiqués* from the Quai d'Orsay. Also de Munsen from the Embassy at Vienna, confirming Whitehall views as to the extreme gravity of the Austro-Servian situation.

Last, but not least, the voice from a certain guarded sanctum in the Kaiserlicher Palais on the Schloss Platz, Berlin, saying in a cipher of grouped numbers, the secret language of Hohenzollern intrigue not understood of little operators—things that bleached the face of the listener in London to the yellow of old cheese.

"As Vicegerent of the World, charged by Almighty God with the supreme duty of maintaining peace among nations . . . warn these silly devils of the danger in which they stand! Just for the word 'neutrality'—a word in War-time often disregarded—they risk annihilation of a dynasty by my conquering sword, and the inevitable blotting-out of the British race. Invasion Belgium indispensable. . . . Must strike the blow before Russia could get to the frontier. Life and death as regards the Success of my Plan. Delay by diplomacy. Promise anything for neutrality. Obtain an understanding of non-intervention. Bluff for all you are worth!"

Again in yet more groups of numbers, the vocal spark sang on and on:

"Attention. If the Secret Service agent who has managed to get into Lord Clanronald's service as under-librarian at Gwyll Castle can secure complete copies—or better still, the originals—of the old Lord's plans for construction of the secret War-machine that hypocritical England has kept up her sleeve out of so-called humanity since the days of the British Regency—strike a deal with him at once. To the *ménu* that will presently be served to our

enemies—beginning with Super-Explosive—explosive bullets, incendiary shells, lachrymatory shells serving as *entrées* —the bombardment of Dover from Calais—the destruction of London and the chief Naval Ports of Great Britain by our Zeppelin Fleet being the *pièce de résistance* of the banquet—the Clanronald Death-engine will be added as fifth course! Thou wilt pay the rogue who has dared to stickle for higher terms ten thousand pounds in English bank-notes on account of the sum of twelve million marks he presumptuously demands of us. The balance will be paid him on personal application at the Wilhelmstrasse—you understand! Warn Prince Henry and von Moltke not to risk bringing the Secret Plans personally. Should the loss of the documents be discovered, suspicion would instantly attach to one of these two. Trust not the thief; he may be tempted to betray us. Send the plans by Undersea Boat 18 now on coast-observation duty in Area 88—fathoms 50—44, east of Spurn Head. Annulled. Forward by air. Squadron-Captain-Pilot von Herrnung of my 10th Field Flight will be detailed for this duty, being now in London investigating the value of a new stabiliser—rejected by the English War Office—which the French Chiefs of the Service Aë are anxious to secure. Tell him to obtain a personal flying-test from the inventor. I say no further! As the Hohenzollern were noble robber-knights, so also were von Herrnung's ancestors. Let the eagle fly home to his Imperial master with booty from across the sea. England may suppose him drowned. France also. . . . We shall know better. . . . A hearty welcome awaits the proud bird-knight alighting on our German soil."

## CHAPTER XXIV

### DISILLUSION

Rhona Helvellyn came stalking in, looked round, recognised Patrine, came over and dropped down beside her on the divan, full to the brim of the invariable subject, and suffering to talk.

Through the good offices of a legal pal she had got in to hear the Suffragette Trial at the Old Bailey that day. Fan Braid and Kitty Neek had been frightfully plucky. Full of grit and vim, in spite of the six weeks' hunger-strike. Began shrieking like Jimmy O! the moment they were brought into the dock by the warders and wardresses. On being rebuked by the Judge, Fan had bunked a bundle of pamphlets at the head of his lordship, catching the Clerk of the Court, who was seated immediately underneath the Bench, no end of a biff in the eye.

"And then?"

Patrine heard a strange voice from her own stiff lips asking the question.

"Then both of 'em were removed from the Dock. It was done—in time!" Rhona's light eyes danced with enjoyment. "Such a scrimmage! Such a rumpus! Took three men and a woman to tackle each of 'em. We could hear 'em giving tongue all the way down to the cells. Then they had to go on with the Trial without 'em." She chuckled. "You may guess there were a lot of us at the back of the Court waiting—just for that! Perfect wadge all together. Hell and trimmings when we started. They had to eject us before they could jog on with their gay old summing-up!"

"But in the end they got through?" The weary voice was so unlike Patrine's that she wondered why Rhona did

not jump and stare at her. But Rhona was mounted on her hobby-horse, and unobservant of other things.

"Through right enough! And Fan and Kitty—" Rhona screwed up her lips into the shape of a whistle, and winked away a tear that hung on one of her fair eyelashes; "It's too brutal! Three months each, and poor little Kitty dying of lung-trouble. They only brought her back from Davos in May. That riles me!" She clenched her hands fiercely and went on, cautiously lowering her tone: "So far I've taken no active share in any Militant Demonstration. Partly because I'd be wiped off the Club books if I got spouting in public, or was mixed up in any police-court business, partly because I'm funky—there's the word! But at last I'm wound up! It was Kitty's little peaky-white face did it! . . . She—she broke a blood-vessel as the warders were carrying her down to the cells."

A sob choked Rhona's voice, and a spasm of misery wrenched her. She controlled herself. She was deadly in earnest—wound up to go, as she had said. She went on, talking rapidly, in a tone that only reached the ear it had been meant for. How many such secret disclosures the Club divan had known.

"I've thought. . . . A regular swarm of Distinguished French and Belgian Big Pots and Little Pots—Mayors—Prefects and Deputies, Judges, Press Representatives and Inspectors-General—are engaged in Discovering England this week as ever is. It's an echo of the Entente Cordiale. Behind the badge of the International Advancement Association—I've got one!—I might drop in at one of their farewell speechifications, I believe the next's on Friday at Leamington—and heckle 'em like one o'clock! Ask 'em why women don't have the Vote in France and Belgium——"

"Don't they?"

"Nix a bit! Not for all the fuss they make about the sex. Or—to fix the scene of my maiden effort nearer home

—there's a Banquet of Archbishops, Bishops and their wives at the Mansion House to-morrow night. Music just after the flesh-pots and before the speeches or after—a select company of Concert Artistes, the gemmen in boiled shirts and the usual accompaniments; the ladies in white with black sashes and black gloves. And that's where I shall come in—in white with black trimmings. Land of Hope and Glory!—when I get up and ask the Archbishop of Canterbury to plump for Female Suffrage!—or shall it be the Lord Mayor? . . . Won't my Uncle Gustavus burst the buttons off his episcopal waistcoat. You've seen him. He's Bishop of Dorminster—and they fasten 'em at the back."

"Let the Bishop keep his buttons on!" said Patrine, suddenly and savagely. "What the—devil does it matter whether women get the Vote? Would we keep it if we got it, or throw it away—oh! idiots—idiots!—to gratify some vulgar vanity, or some beastly sensual whim?"

"Gee-whillikins!" Rhona whistled shrilly in astonishment. "Why, I thought you were one of Us. Not actively militant, but a sympathiser, no end. Didn't you get our Committee in touch with Mrs. Saxham, when we'd set our hearts on having her speak at the Monster Meeting of Women we're going to have in October at the Grand Imperial Hall? She's promised to address us on Suffrage and we're all over ourselves to hear her. That last article of hers in *The National Quarterly*—'The Burden of Tyre,' has collared the literary cake. People tell me who've read it that she doesn't care a hang about the Vote for Women in any other sense than that it'd open a gateway to legislation on the Sex Question of a much more drastic kind. She'd bring in a Bill to have moral offences against children dealt with by a Jury of Mothers—a lot they'd leave of the offender once they'd their claws on him!—and make it a Life Sentence every time, for the fellow who seduces a girl."

Patrine listened in stony silence. Rhona chattered on.

"Of course the work she does amongst those unlucky wretches—young girls and women who've come to grief—is topping. But why waste herself rescuing prostitutes and street-walkers? Aren't any of us good enough—or bad enough to interest her? I'm going to ask her that when you introduce me—remember you've promised to!"

Patrine said in a voice jarred and harsh with anger:

"Since your declared intention is to be offensive to Mrs. Saxham, whose shoes neither you nor myself, nor any woman of our set is worthy to unlace, I take back the promise, if it was ever given!"

"What's up?" Rhona turned and stared. "I say!—but you look fearfully seedy! Worried about Margot, is that it?" She was off on another tack, carried by the light shifting breeze of her imagination. "Poor little Margot!—in spite of good advice and top-hole mascots—booked for the Nursery Handicap—and out of the running for a year!"

"Who told you—that?—about Margot?"

"Melts—the head housemaid here—had it from Kittum's maid Pauline, who dropped in to fetch away some stored luggage of her ladyship's. . . . They've furnished a house at Cadogan Place—Margot and her Franky-wanky. West End enough, and quite exquie inside, but not as convee as the dear old Club. But—I believe I'm boring you." Her nimble glance left Patrine's face, and darted in the direction of von Herrnung. "Who's the big, good-looking, carroty man, gobbling you up with his eyes while he's talking piffle to Cynthia and Trix? Now I remember—I *have* heard some hints of your going over to the Common Enemy." Rhona's sharp light eyes sparkled like polished gold-stones. "Is that the reason why you've bleached your hair? What a putrid shame of you! And the Enemy's a foreigner—a German! Did he give you that gorgeous ring?"

Upon the third finger of Patrine's left hand was the magpie pearl set in platinum, gleaming to its wearer's fevered

fancy, like some malignant demon's eye. Rhona caught the hand, and uttered a little squeak as Patrine wrenched it away. She—Patrine—was driven beyond endurance: her self-command was breaking. Her hair seemed to creep upon her tingling scalp. Down her spine and along the muscles of her thighs passed slow recurrent waves of physical anguish. She could have screamed aloud, torn her garments, set her teeth in her own flesh. But she mastered herself sufficiently to say:

"I won the ring over a bet in Paris. You can see for yourself I don't wear it on the engagement left. Do not despair of me. At this moment I do not particularly esteem women. But on the other hand, I absolutely abominate men!"

"Hope for you then, politically speaking," said the misanthropic Rhona. "What, are you going?"

Patrine had thrown aside her paper and risen, towering over her. She nodded without speaking, and went out of the smoking-room, crumpling the letter she had written in her strong white hand. She would not post it, she told herself as she passed through the outer lounge. She would go and look up Uncle Owen at Harley Street. She spoke a word to an agile hall-boy in the vestibule and he skipped out, and signalled a taxi-cab.

A handsome Darracq four-seater, enamelled bright yellow and fitted in ebonized steel, was waiting by the kerbstone. As the taxi manœuvred to get round it, von Herrnung's voice said, speaking behind Patrine:

"Stop the boy, that machine will not be wanted. . . . I have here a car that is lent me by a friend."

She turned and saw him, standing hat in hand. His tone was pleasant, and he was smiling. He went on:

"He—my friend—is a Secretary of our German Embassy. He has three automobiles—why should he not lend me one?" He replaced his hat and pulled a curved gold cigar-case out of the breast-pocket of his waistcoat asking: "I may light

a *zigarre* after these stupid cigarettes I have been smoking? It will not be unpleasant to *gnädiges Fräulein?*"

His courtesy insulted. His smile was an outrage. She controlled the trembling of her lips with difficulty. Whether he observed or not was uncertain, he seemed to busy himself solely with the selection and kindling of his cigar.

"Pardon that I get in first, as I shall be driving!" he said, and threw away the smoking vesta, pushed back the hall-boy who was wrestling with the door-handle, got in and took his place at the steering-wheel, beckoning to Patrine.

"Thanks, but I cannot. . . . I am going to Berkeley Square."

"I will drop you at Berkeley Square." He met her eyes hardily. "You will not refuse me this pleasure, when I have not seen you since—" The slight significant pause stabbed as it had been meant to. He saw her wince, and finished: "Since two days. Will you not get in?"

She took the seat beside him. He stretched his arm across her knees and shut the door neatly. She leaned back to avoid his touch, and he smiled, feeling her shudder. Her eyes were on his gloved left hand as he drew it back.

He manipulated the electrical starter and the yellow Darracq moved up and out of Short Street. Patrine stared before her, sitting rigid in her place. Not once did her glance visit *him*. But every skilful movement of his hands upon the steering-wheel, every creak of the springy leather cushion under his great body, every tightening of his mouth or twitch of his thick red eyebrows, were photographed upon her brain.

He was irreproachably got up in thin, loose grey tweed morning clothes, cut by a West End tailor, and his feather-weight grey felt hat testified to the make of Scott. His knitted silk tie, a combination of electric blue and vivid yellow, was a discordant note. Patrine was certain it must have been the work of some other woman in Berlin. The heavy flat gold ring through which the ends were drawn

was set with a ruby and two diamonds, another false note that jarred her painfully. But he was looking strong and well and in admirable condition. His blue eyes were bright, his red hair and his tightly-rolled moustache glittered in the sunshine, there was a bloom of perfect health upon his florid skin.

If Patrine did not look at von Herrnung, his eyes were less abstemious with regard to her. Under cover of their short red eyelashes, they scrutinised her from time to time. There was unbridled curiosity in their regard, and also a retrospective vanity, admiration, and resentment as well.

She rode the high horse. She was hellishly sure of herself. Sure of von Herrnung, it might be. This passed in his mind as he said to her:

"Do you know that this car has had the honour to carry the Emperor of Germany? When *Seine Majestät* paid a visit to England in the year 1907, he used it every day."

Patrine returned indifferently:

"It seems to go smoothly."

Von Herrnung said, as the car obeyed every motion of his practised hands upon the steering-wheel:

"It is a wonderful traveller. It has been fitted with a Heinz motor, three times more powerful to its weight than any other known petrol-engine. Some journeys, I can tell you, it has had with the All Highest. Travelling incognito, driven always by a—certain young Prussian officer; then of Engineers—attached to the Personal Staff specially for this work."

"I daresay you mean yourself?"

"That is a clever piece of guessing; I congratulate you, *gnädiges Fräulein.* Well, it is now no secret. I do not object to admit having been the young *Leutnant* in the case. So now you know how I gained my *flair* for English scenery and my violent *penchant* for English beauty. A weakness of which I am rather proud, since it is one the Emperor shares."

The final sentence might have conveyed a jeer. But Patrine was not listening. She called to her companion:

"You are driving in the wrong direction for Berkeley Square, but it does not matter. Please put me down just here at the corner of Harley Street. I can leave this letter at a house there instead of putting it in the pillar-post."

"You are not getting out, *gnädiges Fräulein*. You are coming with me to Hendon. I have there a little business which will occupy an hour." He added with a familiarity that stung, looking at the tense white profile and the black brows knitted in anger: "You are yourself to blame that I cannot part with you. You are really as magnificent by day as by evening—with your so-gloriously-coloured hair. May I also congratulate you on the effective costume? Black and white are our Prussian colours. I take that as a personal compliment."

"Take it as you like, it will not make it one."

"*Sehr gutig*. I do not need telling. When I want things I take them. It is a habit of mine."

He spoke sheer, brutal truth. Oh God! what of Patrine's had he not coveted and taken, only two horrible days ago.

"So," he went on, "you will have to post your letter. I will stop at a *Postammt* and drop it in for you. You see, I am greedy of your society. At any moment I may be recalled to Germany. One must catch the Bird of Happiness and hold it while one can. Now tell me, is not that a pretty speech?"

"Extremely, but it does not alter the situation. I have a particular appointment. I cannot go to Hendon with you."

"I have already told you that we are going there. *Grosse Gott!*" His tone was savage. "How is it that you are so confoundedly stubborn? Do you think such behaviour sensible—or wise?"

"I am certainly wiser than I was two days ago."

He slewed his head round to look at her with a greedy

curiosity. He saw the lines of face and figure grow rigid, and her bare hands clench themselves together in her lap.

He glanced at her ringed hand, then transferred his regard to his own left hand, the glove upon which he had retained at the Club. The soft dressed *suéde* bulged as though a bandage were concealed underneath. She averted her eyes hastily as though she shunned some ugly, sickening spectacle. He said:

"I see that you honour me by wearing my mascot. The magpie pearl most excellently becomes your beautiful hand, my dear!"

They had reached Regents Park Square and were turning into the Broad Walk. She plucked the ring from her bare finger, and held it out to him, saying in a low tone:

"Please take it back!"

"I am to take it back? . . . You are in earnest?"

She repeated her words, holding out the bauble. He released his gloved left hand from the steering-wheel to take it. His eyes were on the road ahead and his face was hard as pink stone. But she heard him give a little sigh of relief as he slipped the ring into an inside coat-pocket. He said, as though to excuse the sigh:

"It was given me in April, when I made my raid on Paris from Hanover, landing my *Albatros* once only during two days' flight. The weather was magnificent. My engine gave no trouble. That is why I call the ring my mascot, you understand. Now that it has been worn by you, it is more precious than when I first received it. Whenever I look at it, it will speak to me of you."

"Don't let it!"

"Why should it not speak of you? Isis! My heart's Queen!"

"I have told you—don't revolt me with—piffle of that kind. And don't touch me, unless you want me to jump out of the car!"

A voice that he barely knew had issued from the face she

turned on him—a face all violet shadows and haggard drawn lines, under the burning splendour of the dead beech-leaf hair. She vibrated like an electrified wire, and round her pale pinched mouth and about her blue-veined temples were little points of moisture, fine and glittering as diamond-dust.

"Am I to understand that my touch is unpleasant to you? That you are angry with me? That you do not love me any more?"

"*Love. . . .*"

She laughed out harshly, hugely disconcerting him.

"Lady Wathe said at that Grand Prix night dinner in Paris that you were without a sense of humour. But you must have a grain or so—to talk of love to me!"

She turned her face away, and the exquisite beauty of her small white ear appealed to him provokingly. He ground his teeth. He could have thrown his arm about her, and crushed the tall, full, womanly figure against him. How superb she was in her mood of hate. The strapped-up wound in his left hand was throbbing and smarting, just as when she had writhed her head free from his furious kisses and bitten him to the bone.

He had made her pay richly for her bite. He hugged himself as he remembered. . . . Now the sting of desire was renewed in him and he eyed her with greediness. Presently he stooped and said in her ear, coaxingly:

"Let us be friends! Dine with me at the Rocroy to-night. We will have a box at the Alhambra, and sup again at the Upas. Say you will come, loved one! Will you not, Patrine?"

"No!"

"No? But I think you mean Yes! Do you not?"

"I have said No! Is that not enough?"

"You are mad!" he blustered at her—"mad as a March hare!"

She answered him:

"I have been mad, but I am sane now and I stay so."

He said scoffingly:

"You may not always remain as you are now!"

If he launched a poisoned dart, its meaning glanced aside from her.

"Shall you not write to me when I am back in Germany? Not one line? Not one single word? Yet I have a few little notes from you that I particularly value. . . ."

"Make the most of them. I shall write no more." And suddenly her hate and loathing of him reached boiling point and ran over. "My God! Can't you understand that I ask nothing better than never to see nor hear of you again!"

"*Grossartig!* You are hellishly conciliatory." His voice was thick and shook with anger. His smile mocked and the look in his eyes was hateful as he pursued in a tone that was now quite gentle and purring: "Just think a bit, my dear! Because—to burn one's boats behind one—that is not prudent at all!"

She did not answer, and he drove on to Hendon, planning fresh assaults upon this unconquerable woman's pride.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THREE MEN IN A CAR

When the yellow Darracq car turned in under the archway that advertised Fanshaw's Flying School in three-foot capitals, the name revived no associations in the mind of Patrine. She had never visited the aërodrome upon an afternoon in the mid-week, when as in the present instance practice and instruction were being carried on. The cafés, no longer crowded by smart people, were thinly patronised by bronzed young men in overalls, not innocent of lubricating medium, thirstily drinking ginger swizzle or sucking iced-lemon squashes through yellow straws. Business-looking middle-aged men discussed the market-prices of steels and timbers, dope and fabrics, over bitter beer and ham-sandwiches, while experimenting amateurs, male and female, discussed in loud, relieved voices the experiences of the premier flight. These, having been previously warned not to experiment upon a crowded system, were now ravenously putting in the solid, three-course lunches they had foregone.

It was a perfect July day, hot and blue and green and golden. To the nor'-west, you glimpsed the elms and oaks and beeches of Boreham Wood, westward the chestnuts of Bushey and Stanmore in fullest summer foliage. The hawthorns of New Barnet were already browning in the sun. Hill and common were plumy with the brake-fern. Heather and ling were purpling into bloom.

Still looking westwards, you snatched a glimpse of Windsor. Eastwards, a diamond set in emeralds, was the Crystal Palace at Sydenham. Across the whitish-grey scarp of Highgate and the verdant shoulder of heathy Hampstead you saw the dun-coloured haze that is the breath of London,

the huge, black, formidable and formless monster, as, sprawling on her ancient River, she keeps her envied place in the Sun.

At the café end of Fanshaw's enclosure the Frogged Roumanian String Orchestra were playing the "Dance Rhapsody" of Delius. From a rival establishment came the brazen strains of a German band in a death-wrestle with ragtime. Behind a straggling crowd of visitors, where the cars that had brought them were parked in a double row, von Herrnung stopped the yellow Darracq, leaned across Patrine's unwilling knees and opened the car-door.

As Patrine was getting out, a large hand in a white leather glove was thrust forwards for her assistance. The owner of the hand was a square-faced, fair-haired, soldierly-looking servant of the somewhat hybrid type that has replaced the carriage-groom. He wore a dark blue livery overcoat with silver braid upon collar, belt, and shoulder-straps, black knee-boots, and a white topped cap with silver braid, a shiny black peak and an enamel front badge in black, white, and red. Looking past Patrine, he saluted in military fashion and spoke to von Herrnung in German, of which language Patrine possessed a smattering:

"Will the *Herr Hauptmann* speak to the *Herrschaft?* Upon business. *Er ist sehr wichtig.*"

Von Herrnung, at the first sound of the messenger's voice, had stiffened to rigidity. He glanced over his shoulder in the direction pointed out by the big hand in the white glove, and answered:

"Say to the *Herrschaft* that I come!"

The groom vanished. Von Herrnung jumped out of the yellow Darracq and went quickly over to the machine that had been indicated, a large, superbly-finished F.I.A.T. touring-car of the landau-limousine type, enamelled dark blue with a narrow silver line of finish. The top was open. A white-capped chauffeur in dark blue and silver livery sat immovable at the steering-wheel, and three men, only one of

whom was plainly visible to Patrine, occupied the roomy body of the car.

The visible man, sitting in the forward seat with his back to the motor, his baldness topped, in deference to the weather, with a white felt Newmarket, was a long-bodied, broad-shouldered personage, certainly over seventy; clean-shaven, with staring eyes of light grey tinged with bilious yellow, and skin of a prevailing yellow-grey doughiness, with a huge wart in the middle of the cheekbone on the side next to Patrine. His clothes were of yellowish-grey like his eyes and skin, his linen had a yellow line in it and a huge, crumpled vest of buff nankeen threw into relief a flaming crimson satin necktie confined within bounds by a flat jewelled ring. He had the air of an old actor of character parts, or of a libertine monk who has foregone the cord and cowled habit. Of the two men sitting facing him little could be seen beyond the peak of a gold-banded white yachting-cap pulled rather low over a bronzed and rather aquiline profile with an upward-turned moustache and slightly-grizzled beard of reddish-brown, and a Homburg straw with a broad black ribbon and a slouched brim, overshadowing the face of the man who sat on White Cap's left hand. An astute and cunning face, his; long and sallow, with narrow, blinking eyes, a drooping nose, and a drooping black moustache. With this its owner played constantly, twisting and pulling it with a delicate white hand that wore a diamond solitaire. He never looked up, when addressed by either of his companions, but raised his eyes to the speaker, and pivoted, without lifting his head.

Von Herrnung's friends were nothing to Patrine, and von Herrnung's person was by now intolerable, yet her eyes unwillingly followed the tall, soldierly figure as he drew himself up, clicked his heels and uncovered. A brown hand went up to the peak of the white yachting-cap, the wearers of the straw Homburg and the felt Newmarket slightly raised their hats. Von Herrnung did not speak first, he

waited bareheaded to be spoken to. When the door of the big blue car was opened by the servant at an imperious signal from the sallow man, von Herrnung got inside, and sat down beside the personage with the wart on his cheek,—leaning forwards deferentially to be addressed by the bearded wearer of the white yachting-cap, who made great play with a brown right hand that sported a heavy gold curb-chain watch-bracelet. Once the hand clenched and shook in vivacious threat or warning, very close to von Herrnung's handsome nose. That made Patrine laugh, and instantly she was angry with herself for laughing. She put up her long-sticked sunshade, turned her back upon the blue F.I.A.T. car and moved away towards the part of the enclosure where the visitors sat or promenaded, drawing eyes as she went with her spangled silver headgear twinkling in the sunshine, and its black cock's plume waving over her strangely coloured hair.

So changed, so changed. She was sensible of an alteration even in her gait and gestures. A sickness of the soul weighed on her body as though she walked in invisible fetters of lead. The free space, the fresh air, seemed to yield no physical stimulus. She had bitten deep into the apple of Knowledge, and found bitterness and ashes at the core.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### A PAIR OF PALS

Among a dozen pairs of masculine eyes that followed the gallant womanly figure, crowned by the plumed hat of silver spangles and displayed in the frank unreticence of fashion by the semi-transparent sheath of glistening white, a pair very blue, very shiningly alert and interested, drew nearer until the elongated shadow of a small boy in Scout's uniform mingled upon the sunlit turf with the longer shadow of Patrine.

His thumping heart had said to him: "You know her!" It was Pat and yet not Pat. Her tall, rounded figure. Her walk. The same face—and another woman's hair. The white gown and the long stole of black cock's feathers he had seen before, and the hat had previously fascinated him. He had asked Pat if it were not made of the twinkly stuff with which they covered the Bobby-dazzlers on Christmas trees? She had cried "Yes!" and assured him that she would always hereafter call it her "Bobby-dazzler chapper." . . . And his Cousin Irma, whom Bawne secretly abominated, had said it was too bad to talk costermonger slang to the child. "*The child.*" . . . A man must be ready to pardon an insult from the unpunchable female. But Bawne found himself wishing that Cousin Irma had been a boy.

He loved Pat. You had to love a person who could keep secrets as faithfully as Dad or Mother, and play tennis and hockey better than a great many grown-up fellows. Bowl you out at cricket, too, middle bail, before you could wink. She could cycle all day without getting knocked up, and swim a mile, easily. For these reasons Bawne knew he

loved her. But he loved her most for the reasons that he did not understand.

"Pat!"

He had screwed up his courage to touch his crusher felt and speak the name, but the tall lady with the electrifying hair did not seem to hear. Her long eyes looked at him in a blind way without seeing him. He had never kissed this frozen, stranger's face.

"I thought you knew me! I most awfully beg your pardon!" he stammered, in scarlet anguish, and the dull eyes suddenly came to life, and the stiff lips smiled:

"It's Bawne. My sweet, I'm glad! How did you come here?"

"Dad brought me because he'd promised," the boy said joyously as they shook hands.

"Where is Uncle Owen?"

"Over there." Bawne pointed to two men talking apart beyond the straggling line of spectators, and Patrine recognised the great frame and scholarly stoop of the Doctor, standing with his side-face towards her, a half-consumed cigar in the corner of his mouth, and his stick, a weighty ivory-topped Malacca, loosely gripped in both hands behind his back.

"And the man he is talking to? Why—of course! It's Sir Roland—how is it I didn't recognise him?"

"The Chief Scout!" Bawne's tone was one of incredulous wonder. "But you couldn't have forgotten *him!* It—isn't possible!"

Nor even to a stranger did he appear a personality to be easily forgotten, the bright-eyed, falcon-beaked, middle-aged man, whose feather-weight crusher felt was worn at an inimitable angle, and whose slight, active figure set off his well-cut morning suit of thin blue serge in a way to arouse envy in a military dandy of twenty-five.

"You see," Bawne explained, "*he* was talking business with Father, so I just took myself out of the way." He

added: "They hadn't told me to, but they might have forgotten. And so"—the big word came out of the childish mouth quaintly—"I acted on my initiative—you understand?"

"I understand." The formal handshake once over, their fingers had not separated. She held in her large, strong, womanly palm the hand that was little, and hard, and boyish. It squeezed her fingers, and the squeeze was an apology. It said:

"I'd like you to have kissed me if there hadn't been lots of people looking. For, of course, you know I love you, Pat!"

"And I love you, Bawne. We'll always love each other, whatever happens," said the answering pressure. Her spoken utterance was:

"So these are your holidays! . . . How did you leave them all at Charterhouse? And—are you still tremendous pals with young Roddy Wrynche?"

He said, with a naïve, adorable gravity:

"Boys don't squabble like girls—and Wrynche is a frightfully decent fellow. We passed together from Shell into Under Fourth, and we've promised always to stand by each other!"

"Good egg! And now, how is it you're here? Has Uncle Owen given in at last about the flying?"

"Really and truly! Man alive!"—Bawne's characteristic expletive—"I've been up to-day in the air-'bus and—wasn't it first-class!"

"Honour?"

"Honour! Twice round the aërodrome with the Instructor—and presently I'm to have a longer flight with Mr. Sherbrand in his monoplane."

"'Mr. Sherbrand' . . ." Patrine repeated rather vaguely. "Sherbrand" had somehow a ring that was familiar. Bawne explained:

"He's a great friend of Father's. He's splendid. A regularly topping chap!"

"And you've actually flown?"

"I've flewed—and I mean to go on with it." He repeated the assurance more sedately: "It's the profession I have chosen. They say you've got to begin young. And my legs wobbled and the ground rocked a bit when I got down on it. But I wasn't air-sick at all."

"*Air-sick*. . . . Are people . . .?"

Bawne said from the pedestal of superior knowledge:

"Oh, aren't they just, like anything! The Calais-Dover steamer-crossing's nothing to it sometimes—the Instructor told me."

Patrine laughed. The latest circulating-library novel, *Love in the Clouds*, had omitted to mention this fact. The heroine had donned an aviator's cap and pneumatic jacket, and "leapt nimbly on board" the aëroplane in half a gale of wind. As the machine dipped and rose gracefully upon the heaving element that cradled it, Enid had experienced merely a delicious exhilaration. Then a crisp moustache had brushed her rosy ear. The voice of Hubert, attuned to deepest melody of passion, had murmured in the shell-like organ of hearing: "Little girl. At last I have you! . . . Mine, mine, my bride of the swan-path!—mine for ever and aye!"

Bawne continued, innocently discounting further statements on the part of the author of *Love in the Clouds*:

"He told me before we went up, you know. Of course, when you're flying you can't hear anything but the racket of the propeller. It goes roaring through you till your bones buzz, and the very ends of your teeth hum. So the other man has to yell at you through a trumpet, or write to you on bits of paper, unless he's switched off the engine for diving, and then you don't feel like talking—that's if you're a beginner, you know. . . . But man alive! it's splendid. You must try it, Pat!"

She declared, laughingly:

"While a single flight costs a brace of my hard-earned

guineas, the sport is not for me! Why haven't I got a pal like your wonderful Mr. Sherbrand? I'm getting envious—you lucky infant, you!"

It didn't hurt to be called an infant by Pat, because she never would have done it in a stranger's hearing. And it was ripping to have her here, sharing his hour of joy.

He told her: "Father brought me here as a reward for making a model aëroplane. Reminds me!—I've got to tell you all about that. But it's only a toy and this is the Real Thing. There's nothing worth having in the whole world," added the unconscious philosopher "unless it's real and true!"

"Am I not real?" Patrine asked, squeezing his shoulder.

"Now you are!" He said it with an effort of candour. "But when I saw you a minute ago, I wasn't—quite sure." He glanced up at her and asked shyly: "Why are you different since you have been away in Paris?"

"Different, how different?" She whipped her hand from his shoulder. Her black eyebrows knitted, and her face stiffened into the strange mask that had puzzled him, under the scrutiny of his clear blue eyes. "Do I seem changed?" she queried. And Bawne answered:

"A little. I was afraid at first you were somebody else, because of"—he said it shyly—"because of your hair."

"My hair?" she repeated blankly, and then said awkwardly: "The air of Paris did that, darling, but it will soon be its old colour again!"

"Will it ever be just like it was before?" asked Bawne, looking innocently up at her, and something broke in Patrine's heart just then. She gave a sudden gasping sigh, and a sudden spate of tears rolled over her thick underlids, streamed down her pale cheeks, and fell upon her broad bosom, heaving under its thin covering of filmy white voile.

"Pat! You're—crying!" Bawne had never yet seen his friend weep, and he was wrung between pity and bewilder-

ment. "Who has vexed you? Who has been hurting you?" he begged, and she answered brokenly:

"No one! . . . Someone. . . . It doesn't matter!" adding: "Would you punch him, if anyone had—done as you say?"

"*Wouldn't* I?"

"My sweet!" Her arm went round his slight, square shoulders. She doted on the little amber freckles on his pure, healthy skin, the little drake's tail of silky red-brown hair at the nape of his brown neck, the half-shy, half-bold curve of his mouth as he smiled, the blue sparkle of his eye glancing sidewise up at her. She found in the pure warmth and sweetness of the slight young body leaning against her, a healing, comforting balm.

"Why aren't you my little brother, Bawne?" she said, hugging him closer. He answered after an instant's thought:

"If my mother could be your mother too, it would be jolly! Not unless! . . ."

He was not going to take on Mildred for anybody. Patrine sighed pensively.

"That's what I used to cry for when I was a little pig-tailed girl, my sonny. More than anything I wanted to belong to Aunt Lynette. But she's so young—only thirty-three. She couldn't be my mother."

"No." His eyes considered her face gravely. "Of course not. You're far too old. How old are you, Cousin Pat?"

"How old am I?" A shudder went through her. "Nineteen in August. And I feel about a hundred and one."

"That's 'cos you're not well!" His eyes were anxious and a little pucker showed between his reddish eyebrows. "You're not going to be ill—are you?" he asked in alarm.

"Not I!" She murmured it caressingly in her deep, soft voice. "My pet, don't worry. Everything's all right with me!—perfectly all right and O. K.! Only talk to me. Don't let me keep on thinking. Things are never so—bally rotten if you can stop brooding over them."

Why did she look like that? What had somebody done to hurt her? His boyish hand clenched, the thumb well turned in over the knuckles. Instinctively Bawne knew that the Enemy, who had stamped that dreadful look of frozen misery on the face of his beloved, white as ivory or old snow in its strange setting of flaming tresses—was of his own sex.

All the while, ever since Patrine had entered the gates of Fanshaw's, the song of the air-screw had not been absent from her ears. The tractor of the practice-engine roared fitfully, like a tiger being prodded in its den by a spiteful keeper's meat-fork. The propellers of the double-engined passenger-buses kept up a steady droning as Fanshaw's pilots followed the pointing arms of the red, white, and blue pylons marking the limits of the air-circuit, or were silent as the machines dropped to earth within the huge white circles where a giant T indicated "Land."

This was not a show day when visitors' half-crowns rattled unceasingly into the boxes at the turnstile. The rows of green-painted chairs behind the whitewashed iron railings of the spectators' enclosure were but thinly patronised by friends of people taking passenger-flights. No man with a megaphone announced events forthcoming or imminent. No white flag fell for the start, no pistol cracked signifying the conclusion of a race.

Three men occupied the Judge's stand behind the Committee enclosure. One, small and dapper, in a frock-coat and topper, kept his eye on what was probably a stop-watch. Another, stout, bearded, and straw-hatted, was absorbedly gazing at the sky through a big pair of Zeiss binoculars. The third, in the uniform of a commissionaire, was an employé of the School. No one manifested any particular interest in them or their occupation. The sparse general public were not enlightened as to the reason of their presence on the Judge's stand.

"Talk," Patrine said, clinging to Bawne, her slender plank in moral shipwreck. "Tell me what Sir Roland and the Doctor are waiting to see. What is that thin man doing with the stop-watch and the note-book? And the fat gentleman beside him, who never leaves off staring at the sky through those big field-glasses. Nothing is billed to happen—there are no numbers up on the pylons—yet something seems to be going on!"

"Rather!"

The boy broke into a little gurgle of excited laughter, and began to dance up and down under the arm that rested on his neck.

"*Rather!* Didn't you know? How funny! Why, man alive, we're waiting for *him!*"

"For him?"

"For Mr. Sherbrand. Father's friend. The Flying Man I've told you about."

"Mr. —— Where is he?" Patrine asked vaguely, looking all about her. In the tumult of her thoughts the name that had been upon a crumpled card suggested no association with that so rapturously uttered by the boy.

"There!" Bawne pointed upwards with another of the excited laughs. "Carrying out a hovering-test. The man with the stop-watch is timing him, and the other with the binnocs is observing him. He's French—no end of an official swell! The French Government sent him," went on the boy, with infinite relish, "to see Mr. Sherbrand test his invention. He thought they didn't catch on, but the hovcrer has fetched them. If he hovers for twenty minutes, ten thousand feet up, his fortune's made!—I heard a fellow say so to the Instructor. Man alive! isn't it topping that you and I should be here to-day!"

## CHAPTER XXVII

### SIR ROLAND TELLS A STORY

WHILE yet the Bird of War hovered invisible at ten thousand feet of altitude, and the lungs of the men aboard her toiled and laboured, and foam gathered about their nostrils and lips, Saxham stood talking with the man who in his eyes ranked above all others, the tried and trusty friend of fourteen years.

In those unforgettable months of the Siege of Gueldersdorp you might have noticed a crow's foot or so at the corner of the Chief's keen falcon-eyes. To-day, their hazel brightness undiminished, they looked at Life from a network of fine criss-crossed lines. But Time, the spider, had spun no web in the fine alert brain, and the man's heart was free from crow's feet or wrinkles. Fresh and evergreen, it was as it would always be, an oasis of kindness for the downhearted or weary, watered by the twin wells of sympathy and enthusiasm. He said, speaking to Saxham of the invisible Sherbrand:

"I wish we had a million like him!"

Saxham answered:

"I wish we had several millions. He is a fine, energetic type. A bit of a hero-worshipper—a bit of a philosopher, a bit of a stoic: '*He hath seen men rise to authority without envy, and schooled himself to endure adversity, that he might bear himself the better when his time should come to rule.*'"

"His time is coming, or I am no judge of capability. And you quoted from the *Encheiridion* of Epictetus, I think? I've always found good reading-meat in that and the *Discourses*. Used to carry a little sixpenny copy about in my pocket, until I wore it to rags."

"I have often seen and noted its raggedness, and its uncompromising Isabella-hue!"

"It was negroid in complexion before the Relief of Gueldersdorp. Perhaps you won't be astonished when I tell you I have got it now." The Chief's smiling eyes narrowed in laughter. "My wife has bound it gorgeously, and with other volumes of my Siege library, it occupies a special and most sacred shelf near my writing-desk at home."

He went on:

"This fine fellow Sherbrand is an old correspondent of mine. He would say I might tell you the story, and I think it's worth hearing, in a way. It must be eight years ago, when he would be about seventeen, that he wrote to me from an engineering college at Newcastle, to say he had read some papers of mine on the subject of scouting, and proposed—if I thought it would not be presumption on his part—save the mark!—to enrol and organise a troop on the lines laid down. He wanted a definite code of Scout law to work on, and Rules and so forth, all of which I supplied him, you may be sure. Busy as I was drilling and cub-licking the North British Territorials, I couldn't find time to spare to run up and see the boy. So he commandeered a holiday and motor-cycled to Headquarters. Rode all through one night in pelters of rain, and caught me in my 5 A. M. tub."

"He meant business."

"Business—and it was up to me to encourage such grittiness and enthusiasm. So I ordered coffee for two, and bacon and eggs for half a dozen, and when I had fed him I talked. My book wasn't published, but I lent him some proof-sheets. He thanked me, but before he took them he had to disburden his mind."

The fine sunburnt hand went thoughtfully to the grizzled moustache, worn rather longer than of old.

"He had got something on his mind. He had been reading that old bogey-book, *Hales on Mental Heredity*, and the

theory of the transmission of base or criminal tendencies from the parents to the children, had haunted him night and day. He said to me, standing up before me, looking about as long and thin as a fathom of pump-water: 'My father was dismissed from the Army in War-time, for not backing up his C. O. Is there a kink in *my* brain or a bacillus lying waiting in *my* body that will one day make a slacker of me?"

Saxham's square face was ashen, but the Chief's eyes were elsewhere.

"And you told him——?"

"I told him, that whilst physical disease and deformity are transmissible from the unhealthy parents to their unlucky offspring, no sensible Christian regarded the theory of inherited vice or crime, as anything but the most pernicious lie that the devil ever invented to spread as a net for the catching of bodies and souls. That seemed to buck him up!"

"I do not doubt it!" said Saxham. He breathed more freely, and his face had regained its natural hue.

"I reminded him," went on the Chief, "that our Army and our Fleet are indebted for thousands of the finest men, morally and physically speaking, to Reformatories and Industrial Schools and Homes. 'Think of the character borne by Barnardo's boys,' I told him, 'and grind the scorpion lie to pulp under your boot-heel, whenever and wherever you find it cocking up its damnable tail!'"

"So he went back," said Saxham, "cheered and strengthened by your sympathy, as—other men have been before now!"

"So he went back to the College, fortified by my bit of nervous English, and worked at his troop for all he was worth. Raked in seventy in the first month, and kept on raking. He is dandy at drill and organisation, is Sherbrand. When he left the College they mustered three hundred strong." The speaker struck his stick upon the

turf and said emphatically: "How it grows!—how the Movement spreads and gathers and ramifies! Do you know Saxham, that there are moments in my life when I am tempted to be proud. When rank upon rank of young, fresh, fearless faces with bright eyes are turned to me. When thousands of active, lithe, healthy young bodies run out into the open and rally about the Chief Scout."

There was a mist in the bright eyes that his manliness was not ashamed of.

"Years ago, when the officer in command of a certain beleaguered garrison was doing his best to defend it, a great Fear came upon him in the watches of a particularly anxious night. Perhaps you will guess what I mean, Saxham? The man had not slept for more weeks than I like to remember, and the hours of rest in the day-time were hot-eyed staring horrors of insomnia. He was—up against it! The shrunken lids would not shut down over his bursting eyeballs, and his jaws were clamped so that he could not yawn. Then, on this night, his Fear rose up and mopped and mowed at him, and it had the kind of face that madhouse doctors and keepers know. He wasn't ordinarily a 'fearful man,' like Kipling's immortal Bengali, but now he was horribly, sickeningly afraid!"

"I guessed it," said Saxham. "I realised what you were suffering, but I did not dare to hint my knowledge to you. There was no danger of madness. But you were certainly on the verge of mental and physical breakdown."

"And being in such desperate case," said the other, "I prayed to God in my extremity. I promised Him if He would help me to carry out my duty to Him, as to my earthly superiors, and those men and women and children who looked to me as their protector and guide, that I would one day, if He spared me, build Him a big Temple, made of the little temples that are the work of His Hands."

"And to-day the Temple is a reality!"

"A grand reality. East, West, North, and South, it

spreads and widens and towers. It is built of boys. Clean-limbed, clean-minded, self-respecting fellows, scorning vices, eager for service, sensitive in Honour, chivalrous, patriotic, keen for Truth and Right. It frightens me, Saxham, when I think what a leaven is working through these boys of mine, potential fathers of sons in the ripeness of Time, for the ultimate regeneration of this vicious, degenerate world. It makes me understand how near old Coleridge got to the live heart of things when he wrote the *Ancient Mariner*. The service of Almighty God is the love of your fellow-man. But why to me, and not to another worthier, should God have given this wonderful, glorious thing to bring about? . . ."

"Because you are worthy of doing His work for Him. Has He not used you as His instrument in my own case? Should I not own to this, I who owe everything to you?"

The other laid a hand on the great shoulder of the Dop Doctor.

"If ever you owed me anything, Saxham, you paid me long ago!"

He was silent a moment and said in a lighter tone:

"I am not quite clear yet as to how you met my whilom Scoutmaster."

"Our acquaintance dates from a cross-Channel flight he made in the end of June."

"I know." The Chief prodded the turf with his walking-stick. "A French pilot-officer of their Service Aëronautique, a certain Commandant Raymond, who flew here in the contest for the Ivor International Cup in May, had heard of Sherbrand and his inventions from Lamond of the Central Flying School. He took a shine to the aërial stabiliser and got his Chiefs to give it a trial. That came off on the Grand Prix Sunday, when Paris went wild over the Sarajevo affair."

"And scenting War in the air," said Saxham, "Sherbrand

promptly took wing for England without waiting for the decision of the judges who were present at the test."

"Did he? He has keen scent."

"Better now," said Saxham laughing, "than when he came to me—on the recommendation of an old patient—suffering from an aggravated form of nasal catarrh. He had had it at intervals for years, and suspected it to be owing to what he described, in the language of the engineering-shop, as "a defect in the air-intake." He proved to be right—and I sent him into the Hospital, where Berry Boyle performed a slight minor operation which removed the trouble, and left him capitally fit. Then, when he came out of the Hospital, he found a letter from the French Consul waiting at his office——"

The Chief interpolated:

"Ah yes. The aërial stabiliser had gained the suffrages of Messieurs the Chiefs of the Aëronautique Française. I hope M. Jourdain's report to his Government will induce them to buy the patent. For, judging by the interest that the representatives of another Power seem to take in——"

The Chief broke off. The smiling lines about his eyes and mouth had vanished as he queried: "Who is the lady my Scout over there is squiring? A superbly-shaped young woman, with hair of the fashionable terra-cotta shade. But for the hair, I should have said it was your niece, Patrine."

Saxham's eyes followed the direction of the Chief's glance. He said, and his face looked hard as a mask of stone:

"Your memory for faces is correct as usual. The lady with the terra-cotta hair is my late brother's daughter, Patrine."

The Chief's familiar whistle filled in a space of silence, with a pensive little fragment of Delius' *Spring Song*, while Saxham's frown grew deeper and his jaw thrust out more angrily. Then the well-known voice said:

"I am sorry that Miss Patrine has been tempted to follow the fashion. But I regret still more her choice of friends!

I refer to the German officer in whose company your niece arrived here, in a yellow Darracq car, about half-an-hour ago." The speaker made sure, with a rapid glance to right and left, that no listener was standing near them, and added: "I know that I may trust you as myself in any private or official matter. Between ourselves frankly, I am here to-day for the purpose of—keeping an eye on this particular man!"

The Doctor's vivid blue eyes darted rapier-points at the other, from caves that had suddenly been dug about them. The General went on:

"The man himself is no common spy, though he may on occasion act as an agent or post-box for Secret Intelligence communications. He is an extraordinarily able young officer, a squadron captain in their Field Flying Service, with some astonishing records to his credit, though he was an Engineer Lieutenant in 1907 when he came to England as chauffeur-officer attached to the Kaiser's Personal Staff. For a comprehensible reason his superiors desired him to improve his knowledge of the topography of the British Isles. He certainly did so, but"—the keen eyes twinkled—"the record runs accomplished by von Herrnung with the All Highest as passenger, were not unattended, or unobserved by us. That he is well-born and well-looking is undeniable, and these advantages, with other social gifts, may easily attract your niece, like any other of Eve's daughters. But to say the least it is inadvisable that she should encourage the advances of this man, or of any other German officer,—when the next forty-eight hours may see Britain and Germany at grips in War."

"That is your opinion?"

"It is my plain, unvarnished opinion, speaking as one of those who are admitted behind the scenes. Not that I am infallible, but the Signs and the Tokens all lead one way." He lifted his lean brown hand and pointed eastwards. "For years they have been making ready, but now—what a frenzy

of ordered preparation. What secret councils, what reiteration of orders, what accumulations of stores, what roaring of electric furnaces—I'd give my little finger to know what chemical they're making in huge bulk at the Badische Anilin-und-Soda Fabrik, and hundreds of other dye and bleaching-powder works in Germany and Austria! —every one backed up by the German Imperial State or the Dual Monarchy on the understanding that at the signal, they are to turn to and turn out—what? Benzine for phenol, phenol for picric, and toluene for Super-Explosive, that's understood. But this stuff puzzles me. Do you see the Senile Arc in my eyes yet, Saxham? It must be that I'm getting old!"

He smiled his whimsical smile and went on:

"A day or two after the burial of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his morganatic partner, murdered by some fanatics among the Greater Serbs, a huge majority among the German military and naval officers doing duty in their Colonies, or on political service in Africa, were recalled by Wireless. Leave has been stopped. Rolling-stock in inconceivable masses is being concentrated on the greater strategic railways, while the official and semi-official Press prates and gabbles of peace and neighbourly goodwill!" He shrugged. "Things were safer when they yelled and foamed in convulsions of Anglophobia. Then one doubted. . . . Now one is sure! . . . Ah, I thought I wasn't mistaken. Here's Sherbrand coming down!"

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE GOD FROM THE MACHINE

The dazzling turquoise of the sky was now streaked with milky bands of haziness. Dappled golden-white cloudlets at the zenith made what is known as mackerel sky. Trails of rounded stratus floated low in the east and south-east. Long shadows of hangars, pylons, semaphore and electric searchlight-stations, stretched over the turf from westwards, crossed by perambulatory shadows of people moving about. These became stationary, betokening that popular interest was newly awakened. Umbrellas and sticks flourished towards the sky. Bawne gave a little crow of delight as the whitish-brown, shining shape of the monoplane dived down out of the empyrean, travelling with a bold, beautiful swooping glide that took away the gazer's breath.

"Look, oh look!" Bawne gasped, leaning against Patrine. Now her tardy interest was genuinely awakened. Reaching the end of its glide, the monoplane had regained the horizontal position. As she flattened out and hung well-nigh motionless in mid-air with the sunlight beating on and drenching her fragile, lacy structure, she was a thing of beauty and of wonder. The humming of her tractor came to you mingled with the buzzing of her gyroscopic hoverer, like the incessant vibration of living, sentient wings.

She seemed to tire of hanging between earth and heaven, ceased buzzing, tilted a wing sharply and began to frolic after it as a kitten runs after its tail on a hearthrug, or as a swallow gambols on a chase after gnats, always turning towards the West, whilst her greyish shadow danced and skipped upon the gold-white cloud-surfaces to eastwards a long way below her, like the ghost of an aëroplane. All the

time she was gobbling up distance, steadily descending. She presently reversed her sun-worshipping tactics, dived, and spiralled, banking, from west to east. You saw plainly the helmeted heads and slightly hunched shoulders of the pilot at the controls and the mechanic strapped in the forward cockpit.

Soon she hovered again and swooped, so suddenly that Patrine nipped Bawne's shoulder, saying "Great Scott!" under her breath. Another long sweeping glide brought her close to the green turf of the aërodrome. Then, with an adroit flexing of the wing-tips, she balanced, flattened, and landed lightly within the huge white circle, rocking a little on her tyred wheels.

The man with the stop-watch checked the mechanism, the bearded man with the big binoculars lowered and closed them, scribbled in a memorandum-book and came down the judge's stand. The Bird of War's mechanic stayed in his place, the pilot unhitched his body-strap, pushed up his goggled visor, threw a long leg over the fuselage and jumped lightly to the ground. He staggered as he reached it, recovered himself and stood breathing quickly, as a man overcoming giddiness, or other physical sensation of distress.

Tall, young, and lightly built, with long active limbs and a physique suggestive of youth and courage and enterprise, as he stood motionless, his eared and goggled cap now in hand, the play of sunlight upon his thin brown waterproof gabardine and overalls made him look like a statue of Mercury wrought in pale new bronze. And with a lifting of her sick heart as though it had suddenly spread wings, and soared into a region of unlimited space and glorious freedom, Patrine recognised her Flying Man of the Jardin des Milles Plaisirs.

From what airt, of what world unknown, did it blow, that cool, fragrant wind that then and always heralded for

Patrine his coming? It took her by surprise; lapped her delicately about; enveloped her from head to foot in its pure invisible waves. The hot, sore places in her heart were bathed and healed, the deep caverns filled, the little thirsty rock-pools set awash and brimming. When the sough of it was no longer in her ears or the tug and flutter of it among the folds of her garments; when she ceased to be conscious of the cool resilient pressure upon cheek and neck and forehead—her brief sweet hour of joy was over. Sherbrand had gone away again.

"*Cela ira-t-il, monsieur? Je suis prêt à faire une nouvelle demonstration si vous n'êtes pas satisfait.*"

His clear, strong voice speaking in laborious public school French gave her a delicious shock of pleasure. He was addressing the stout, bearded Frenchman who, accompanied by the thinner man who had timed Sherbrand by the stop-watch, now walked across the turf to shake the aviator's hand. As Sherbrand spoke, he drew a white handkerchief from the sleeve of his gabardine and wiped from the corners of his mouth some little blobs of foam, slightly bloodstained. The stout, friendly Frenchman glanced at him, and uttered an exclamation. Sherbrand shook his head in vigorous protest and laughed, repeating his offer to demonstrate again. Upon which the bearded man, who had also a moustache with thick, stiff waxed ends, and wore a large checked-pattern summer suit with a white drill waistcoat, a low collar and a necktie with flowing ends, and was topped with a high-crowned straw hat that suggested Trouville in mid-season, negatived the proposal with a vivacious gesture, pouring forth a stream of words:

"*Au contraire, Monsieur, je suis convainçu que vous avez une idée superbe. Nous vous avons observé avec la lunette Zeiss, pendant votre vol, et nous avons constaté le temps très soigneusement: vous avez maintenu le bruit et la stabilité pendant cinq minutes de plus que les vingt-cinq minutes stipu-*

*lées. Permettez moi comme une simple formalité de voir votre altimètre?"*

"By all means!" Sherbrand returned.

They went back to the aëroplane together, and Sherbrand reached over and unhooked the altimeter from a board in the pilot's cockpit, and the bearded man examined it, and then cordially shook hands.

"Within two days, at latest. Possibly sooner!" Patrine heard the straw-hatted, bearded gentleman say in English, pronounced with a strong French accent. "Believe me," he added, "I shall represent most strongly the usefulness of your invention to the Chief of the État de l'Aviation. *Au revoir, Monsieur, et encore mes félicitations!"*

Then he went away with the small dark man who had used the stop-watch, and who carried the Zeiss binoculars slung in their case.

During this business interview Patrine had felt Bawne panting and wriggling close beside her, like an excited, but well-mannered fox-terrier waiting to be whistled for. But Sherbrand, though he glanced at the boy smilingly, had turned aside to engage in conversation with Saxham, and the Chief Scout, whom Sherbrand saluted in orthodox Scout fashion, flushing red under the clear sunburn that darkened his fair skin.

"He's one of Us!" Bawne whispered to Patrine, his own young face alight with pleasure. "He was Scoutmaster of a troop in the North, he told me, and I know he must have been a splendid one. He's the kind of chap who'd be prepared for anything. Don't you think he looks like that?"

Patrine did not answer. She was feeling "cheap," as Lady Beauvayse would have expressed it. She had put the man out of her thoughts because she had taken it for granted that Fanshaw's instructor could not be a gentleman. Now, as she watched Sherbrand in conversation with the elder man, his manner of quiet, well-bred deference, mingled with

a pleasant courtesy, showed her beyond all doubt that his place was above the salt.

He had looked towards her, when he had smiled at Bawne, and his glance had swept over her without recognition. She would have known him anywhere, while he——! She had forgotten her preposterously-coloured hair.

How sweet the breeze was, bringing from the west the smell of strawberry-fields and red and white clover. Yet she had not noticed it until now. Her mood had changed. She had put away the thing she most hated to remember. She felt almost like the Patrine of two days ago.

"Miss Saxham!"

It was von Herrnung's voice speaking behind her, and with a shock of loathing horror she remembered all. She turned to see his tall figure approaching. The first impression was that he was ill; the next, that he was furiously angry. His florid complexion had bleached to an ugly, greenish pallor, even the blue of his eyes had faded to a curious lilac hue. He carried in his gloved left hand, and with evident care, a flat strapped wallet of brown leather, fastened with two Bramah locks and a lock-strap. He said to Patrine in a jarring voice of resentment and impatience:

"I have been looking for you. Could one not leave you for a minute but you must go off by yourself? *Sapperlot!* Whom has one here? Where did you pick up the boy?"

Her heart swelled as Bawne looked up at her in astonishment, then transferred his stare to von Herrnung, puckering his brows in disapproval of the rude, strange man. She answered as calmly as was possible:

"This is my cousin, Bawne Saxham, Count von Herrnung."

"Why did you leave me?" von Herrnung grumbled as Bawne stiffly saluted, and she told him:

"Because I saw you occupied in conversation with your German friends."

"Women are incomprehensible creatures! . . . How do

you know that they were German? At any rate, whether they were or not, they have gone away now! You find me annoyed. It is because they are—what shall I call it?—perhaps a little exigent. Now I will have a smoke. I suppose you do not mind?"

He had not freed his hand from the brown leather satchel to remove his hat when he had mopped his perspiring forehead, with a big cambric handkerchief scented with the *très persistant* perfume that always clung about his clothes. Nor did he relinquish it to help himself to a cigar, but opened the gold case containing the weeds with the hand that drew it from his pocket, extracted a cigar with his teeth, and returned the case to his pocket; then produced a matchbox, opened it in the same way, picked out a match, shut the box, and struck the match upon it, saying to Bawne, as he blew out the first mouthful of smoke: "What do you think of that, my fine fellow? Should I not make a famous one-handed man?" But Bawne's suffrages remained unwon, although the dexterity of the thing had secretly pleased him. He remained doggedly silent, scowling with his reddish-fair brows, thrusting out his chin.

"Should I not? Tell me!" von Herrnung persisted. "Or is it that British boys are cowards and afraid to answer when they are spoken to?"

"I am not afraid—of anything or anybody!"

Bawne reddened and looked the taunting big man between the eyes, squarely. The look added—*And least of all of anybody like you!* He went on:

"But I think it takes more than—that kind of being clever—to make a famous man."

"*Nicht so schlimm!*" Von Herrnung nodded. "But all the same these little tricks are worth knowing. You might be bound with ropes to a post, or tree, or waggon by the enemy, and if he happened to have left your matches on you—and you could get one hand free—there is no knot man could tie that I could not wriggle myself out of!—you

might burn the rope and get away! I did that once when I was a gunner-boy of seventeen in South Africa——"

Von Herrnung stopped short. Bawne asked simply, and with the same straight look between the eyes:

"Did you fight with the Boers against us in the War?"

Von Herrnung did not seem to have heard. He had caught the drift of a sentence spoken by Sherbrand, who was answering to a question of the Chief Scout.

"Oh yes! I live here—have quarters over Mrs. Dunlett's restaurant—you could communicate with me practically at any time. We've the 'phone and a private telegraph-office, and the wireless—under the usual licence from the Postmaster-General."

He pointed towards the well-known tall posts with the short cross-pieces, china insulators and lines of thick wire, standing beside the telegraph-cabin, over the roof of which straddled the wireless installation's tall, latticed steel mast.

"We find it useful for business as well as instructional purposes," he went on. "Macrombie—the man in charge—is a one-time Royal Navy Petty Officer Telegraphist and a first-class operator." Sherbrand's mouth twisted a little at the corners as he added: "About twenty-four days out of thirty, let us say!"

The quick rejoinder came:

"Then he's D. O. D. two working days in the month, not counting Sundays. I've met plenty of Macrombies in my time. This doesn't happen to be the monthly pay-day, by any chance, or one of the other close days in its neighbourhood?"

"No, no! He's as right as rain and as sober as a seal," said Sherbrand. "And—this tall fellow with red hair must be the man who has written to me upon business. I shall have to go to him."

They exchanged a left-handed grip, mutually smiling.

"Good old habits stick," said the Chief, and Sherbrand answered:

"Fortunately, they do. Let me say again how much and how gratefully I have to thank you for the teaching that has helped me to find myself!" His clear light glance reverted to Saxham. "The Doctor too, for giving me this chance of meeting you. Please tell him the story if you think it would interest him. I hope with all my heart, sir, that you will soon come here again!"

"I had already taken the permission for granted," the Chief said, as Sherbrand saluted and went forward to meet "the fellow with red hair." "There is big business in that gyroscopic stabiliser of his," he added to Saxham, "and our friends at the French War Ministry have tumbled to it as one might naturally expect. So much the worse for our bungling bigwigs at Whitehall, who've let a good thing slip, for the millionth time, out of their claws. But taking for granted the value of the patent, and recognising the likelihood of the French bid stimulating Teutonic competition——"

The gentle, modulated voice broke off. Von Herrnung had stepped out upon the green and was striding towards the lightly-moving, less stiffly-carried figure of Sherbrand, the approximation of the two somehow suggesting a salute of gladiators previous to the fight. Now the big, grey-clad German was arrested in the middle of his stride by the sudden kling-a-ling of a motor-gong, a sharp crystal vibration that stiffened him to attention, and pricked his ears for a repetition of the sound.

It did not immediately come. He raised the left hand that held the leather satchel, and swung it from front to rear, so that it was for a moment clear of the outline of his body, as who should signal: "*I have it safe!*" Quick, watchful eyes noted this. Took in also the ornate bulk of the dark blue F.I.A.T. touring-car, as with the characteristic, noiseless smoothness of its make, it glided between the ranks of parked and waiting automobiles, and stopped in the open, perhaps some forty yards away.

A fat yellow hand, with a twinkling solitaire upon it, waved. A brown hand, with a massive gold curb-chain watch-bracelet on the wrist of it, beckoned imperiously. Something had been forgotten, something was still to say. Von Herrnung wheeled, and went back in his traces as obediently as the pointer that has been called to heel. He did not uncover, perhaps he had been told not to. He saluted, and stood stiffly, listening to a harsh German voice that yapped at him. All his arrogance and swagger seemed to have been juggled out of him by the gestures of the brown hand with the flashing wrist-bracelet, emerging from the white cuff with jewelled sleeve-links and the snowy sleeve with its broad bands of glittering golden braid.

"*S'th!*"

The slight sound pulled Saxham's head round. He had not been looking at the occupants of the blue F.I.A.T. His eyes were intent on the tall white figure of the woman standing beside his boy. Her black lace sunshade was closed. She held the tall-sticked thing at arm's-length, leaning upon it, and the westering light smote a myriad of multi-coloured sparkles out of the tinsel spangles of the hat with the single black cock's plume. The queer headgear crowning her barbaric hair, and her full white oval face with its wide, low, arched black brows and long eyes, made her seem strange, alluring, as some tall-stemmed, exotic flower, sprung at the incantation of an Oriental conjuror, from a green stretch of English turf.

In the same instant von Herrnung touched his hat, stepped back from the blue car, wheeled and walked away toward the waiting figure of Sherbrand, the sallow man in the Homburg hat gave an order, the chauffeur touched the electric starter, and the F.I.A.T. turned and smoothly bowled away. But in the instant of its turning, the bearded man in the white naval uniform rose in his place, and obtruding half his short, bulky body across the lean person of his sallow neighbour, scrutinised the face and figure of

Patrine Saxham with a cool, appraising deliberateness that tortured the wincing flesh it enveloped like the cut of a carriage-whip.

They were full, bright, and rather handsome grey-blue eyes shadowed by the white cap-peak, and they had the indefinable expression of authority and power. Their glance said—and the face with the perfectly-trimmed beard and the upturned moustache wore a curious smile that bore out the glance's meaning:

"*So!* That's the woman!" And a surge of scalding shame and bitter resentment rose in the heart of Patrine Saxham and filled it to the brim.

She could not have explained why she felt certain that her shameful secret was known to the man with the powerful eyes, the cast of whose face with its pointed beard faintly reminded one of the King and the Tsar.

Patrine had always abominated cheap sentiment. She had once laughed until she cried at a revival of an old four-decker drama, whose hero, waking to the knowledge of a committed, irrevocable deed cried in throaty, stagy tones of anguish upon God to put back the dreadful clock of Time and give him yesterday.

Now she perceived the deep, vital interest of the commonplace human story. If asking Him on whom that other sinner cried would wipe from Time's register a span of hours between twelve P. M. and three o'clock in the morning—blot one deed from the Roll of things that done, are beyond Humanity's undoing—Patrine told herself that it would be worth while to wear sackcloth, live on boiled field-peas, drink brook-water, and pray—until her knees were worn to the bone.

She caught Saxham's piercing glance across the intervening strip of greensward. He turned away his eyes, and a shudder went through her frame. Had he suspected—could anyone have found out and told him? The Doctor's head was bent now as the General talked to him. It

seemed to her that a muscle in his lean cheek twitched, a characteristic sign with him of excitement, or emotion. She wondered what the General had said to Uncle Owen to make him look like that.

As a fact, the quiet voice was saying in Saxham's ear:

"And prepare against a surprise, Doctor—for though your nerves are tough as aluminium bronze, a few million gallons of water have rolled under the Thames bridges since you and I held Council of War. . . . As I mentioned before, the interest taken by the French Government in Sherbrand's gyroscopic hoverer may well have stimulated the interest of our Teuton neighbours. But it doesn't explain the presence on Fanshaw's Flying Ground of Lieutenant-General Count Helmuth von Moltke, Chief of the German Great General Staff, and—Grand Admiral Prince Henry of Prussia, brother of the Kaiser—in a F.I.A.T. touring-car!"

## CHAPTER XXIX

### A SECRET MISSION

"CAN it be possible——" Saxham checked himself. "You see how rusty I am getting, General. You refer to that machine that turned out from where cars are parked just now. The German fellow went up to it. . . . It had a groom beside the chauffeur and three other men inside it. . . . While I was looking—elsewhere—it must have moved away!"

"It has only turned the corner of the café-restaurant," the Chief said in his quiet tones. He glanced in the direction of the squat block of gaily painted wooden buildings devoted to the inner needs of Fanshaw's clients. "The awning hides it, but I can see a bit of it still. Until it moves, I can go on talking. Frankly, I am in the position of the High Church curate who went out wild-pig shooting in the territories of the Limpopo with a single-bore hammer-gun of grandpapa's pattern—and got his choice of pot-shots between a lion and a rhino. Prinz Heinrich is my royal lion and von Herrnung,—who counted for little more than a bush-pig—has suddenly swelled into a rhinoceros."

He pulled the grizzled moustache thoughtfully, keeping his eyes glued on the back of the big blue car.

"If I could get hold of Sherbrand!—but the chance is dead for the rhino and lion winding me. Old von Moltke with the big wart on his ginger-coloured face, and the charming manner that makes you forget that you don't like him!—would certainly recognise me—and the nautical Hohenzollern and I have met once or twice before. I must lay low like Brer Rabbit, and take a single-handed chance. No, no, Doctor, you have your patients to look after! I

am not going to drag you into this. But if I'd got a couple of my Boy Scouts handy——" He broke off, encountering Bawne's bright eyes. "By George, Doctor! I'm going to chance it! I'm going to give your youngster an opportunity to prove his Saxham blood!"

The Master-hand gave the Scout's Sign, and Bawne shot across like a brownish streak of swiftness. He drew himself up, gave the Full Salute, and stood waiting, his rigid attitude in sharp contrast with his dancing, expectant eyes. The Doctor looked at his watch and moved away silently. The Chief said in a clear undertone:

"You see that tall, red-haired man in grey clothes over there with Mr. Sherbrand? Don't look at him openly, or he will know we are talking about him, but take a sidelong gliff, and say."

"I see him, sir."

"Do you know anything of him? Stand easy and answer carefully."

The hand came down from the hat-brim. The boy said:

"I've heard him talk, sir, and I think he is German. I'm learning that and French at Charterhouse."

"He is a German. Do you speak enough of the language to understand him, suppose he were talking to one of his countrymen?"

"*Ich—kann—lesen, aber Ich kann es—nicht sprechen.*" The answer came slowly. "And if they weren't using crack-jaw words, sir, or talking very quick, I might manage—I *could* make out a lot of what they said."

"Very well, keep your man under close observation and—you see that brown satchel he has in his hand?"

"I've seen it close, sir. A flat brown leather despatch case thing—with a criss-cross pattern on the leather, and two locks, and another lock on the strap that goes round. He hadn't it with him when first I saw him talking to—a lady. Then a man—a servant—came and called him away to speak to some gentlemen in a big blue motor-car. One of

them—fat and old and bald—with a wart on his cheek, who wore a white topper, and yellowy clothes, and a red necktie, and looked rather like a—like an Inspector of Sunday Schools in shooting-clothes—passed him the leather case. That's how I know he didn't bring it, sir. Oh! and the yellow car he drives isn't British. She's got an oval International plate with the German 'D' in black on a white ground."

"I am glad my Scout knows how to use his eyes!"

The Chief's own eyes were crinkled with merriment. That Moltke, the Chief of the German Great General staff, bosom friend of the All Highest, should resemble a stout Inspector of Sunday Schools in the estimation of a small British boy, was lovely in the extreme.

"Well, I want to know what the big German officer—he is an officer!—does with that leather satchel he's carrying so carefully. Where he goes with it, whom he talks to, and what he says to them. Find out whether it is light or heavy, if it is what I believe it to be, you might be rendering good service to your country in destroying it. But you'll be doing all I want or expect, if you stick to the man who carries it!"

"I'll do that, sir, on my Honour!"

"Good! Make your little German serve you. I may have to leave here upon this business, but I'll be back within, at least—half an hour. If he goes before I get back, find out where he is going. If you can't find out, follow him. On foot if he walks, in a taxi if he doesn't. Here are six separate shillings—in that case you'll want money for fares. Remember, if things take a puzzling turn and you find yourself in a tight place, whisper a quiet word to Sherbrand, though I'd prefer you to carry through on your own! Report to me, in case he goes before I get back here—at Headquarters, Victoria Street. Have you got all this tucked away safe in your head?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then quit yourself like a man. My signal to you that I have left will be a dog's yelping. Ah!" The keen bright eyes, glued on the distant back of the blue car, had seen the rear wheels moving. Before the F.I.A.T. glided smoothly out of eyeshot the Chief had hurried away.

In the opposite direction to the archway of exit, the slight, active figure in the perfectly-cut blue serge morning clothes and pot hat of Bond Street block, was rapidly walking. Bawne doubted his eyes for a moment before he remembered that the Collingwood Avenue ran along that side of the Flying Ground fence. There was a smaller gate in charge of a commissionaire, in the fence, about a hundred yards along it. Taxi-cabs were standing outside the gate. Any person on foot or awheel, leaving the Flying Ground, must pass the gate and the taxi-stand. You could see through the chinks in the fence when they passed, nip out when they were well by, and follow in a green-flagged chuffer. Bawne had settled this to his satisfaction before a wrench at the rein of duty pulled his head round to the business on hand.

"I'm not spying on Mr. Sherbrand," the boy told himself, gritting his small square teeth doggedly. "I've *got* to listen, so as to understand the German's game. And I'm going to. This is how I'm going to!"

He began to turn hand-springs after the fashion of the London street Arab, thus lessening the distance between himself and the talking men. They glanced at him, and Sherbrand grinned, but they looked back again directly at each other. Then Bawne threw himself down and panted, rolled over and lay, still panting. Now he was near enough to hear what passed between the two.

Sherbrand said:

"No, I was not particularly solid in my conviction that the aërial stabiliser would take the fancy of the Chiefs of the Service Aëronautique. An accident prevented me from witnessing the final test, and I got what the Americans call cold feet and judged it no use staying in France longer.

So I flew back here, starting early by daylight the next morning, with Davis, my mechanic, and found a cable waiting at my office to say the working of the invention had been observed with interest by the Chiefs of the S. Aë. F., and that if I could carry out a satisfactory time-trial at my headquarters in the presence of the French Consul, the authorities at the Ministry of War would be willing to buy my patents for France. As it happened, I was suffering from a slight obstruction in the nasal passages that spoiled my climbing. It was absolutely necessary to go into Hospital. That is why I could not give M. Jourdain an earlier date for the hovering-test you have just seen carried out."

Von Herrnung demanded:

"But did you not receive a letter containing a business proposal? A communication from Rathenau, Wolff and Brothers, Aëromotor Engineers of Paris, 200, Rue Gagnette? I happen to know that it was posted, and the date being that of the Paris trial, Herren Rathenau and Wolff certainly possess the prior claim!"

"Their communication reached me in Hospital, three days later than the French War Office cable," Sherbrand answered. "It had been forwarded from the makeshift hangar I rented at Drancy—a mistake in the address being the reason of the delay!"

"That fellow Lindemann is a *Dummer Teufel*," said von Herrnung, shrugging.

"My German landlord. . . . Why—do you know him?" asked Sherbrand with a look of surprise.

"No, certainly. But you—you said the fellow's name was Lindemann. Not so? No?—then I am mistaken," said von Herrnung with another shrug. He hurried on as though to cover a mistake with a spate of sentences:

"Of course, with Rathenau and Wolff I have nothing to do. Save as an old customer, of whom they have asked a favour—you understand? Indeed I—you will pardon me! —do not your hoverer regard as an original invention. In

1912 our German Ministry of Marine completed a gun-boat fitted with a gyroscopic stabiliser to prevent rolling—you understand—in stormy weather. The device was hellishly effective."

"So effective," rejoined Sherbrand, without the quiver of a facial muscle, though there was laughter in his eyes, "that it broke up the ship."

"*Es mag wohl sein!*" returned von Herrnung, covering discomfiture, if he felt it, with his imperturbable shrug and hard blue stare.

Sherbrand went on, straightening his wide shoulders and clasping his hands loosely at his back as he talked:

"I don't claim that my patent is an absolutely new invention. Far from it. But it is a new arrangement of some old ideas, and limited though its use may be—it works. You have seen it working. You agree that it justifies its name?" He waited for the assent, and went on: "Possibly if I had described it as an aërial drag-anchor, I should have explained its uses more clearly. It is no good at all when your machine isn't flying level—of course you understand that? If you were ass enough to try to dive without cutting out the power that drives the horizontal screws you would drop to the ground like a plummet and break into a million of little bits—or dig a hole in the earth big enough for a Tube Station. But—keeping an even line of flight—when you switch it on it pulls against the tractor just sufficiently to give you—not immovability—but poise. Sufficient to take a photograph or drop an explosive with a good deal of accuracy."

The small boy lying outstretched on the warm turf near them, thought dolefully:

"*Dummer Teufel* meant 'stupid devil' in German. But this talk is dreadfully business, I can't stow away much. Man alive! I wish Roddy Wrynche or some other fellow with a top-hole memory had got this job to tackle. And yet the Chief trusted it to *me!*"

All this, while Sherbrand was explaining.

"M. Jourdain declared himself completely satisfied. His observer said that I maintained poise and stability for five minutes longer than the stipulated twenty-five. He looked at the altimeter and said I should receive a definite answer within a couple of days. . . . Unlucky brute! Someone must have run over him!"

The shrill yelp of a hurt dog had evoked Sherbrand's exclamation. The sufferer's plaint came from the Collingwood Avenue, on the other side of the fence. Thrice the excruciating sound ripped the ears, then died out in a sobbing whimper. . . . *That was for me!* Bawne told himself, as von Herrnung went on:

"Still, you are not pledged. There is no definite understanding. In the interests of the wealthy firm I am asked to represent—solely as a matter of courtesy, because they have been immensely civil to me in business,—you would not refuse me a test?"

Sherbrand said, drawing off his left glove and showing blood oozing from under bluish-looking finger-nails:

"I found it uncommonly parky to-day at 10,000 feet. There was a nor'-east breeze, a regular piercer. Found myself spitting blood rather badly, and to be candid, I was uncommonly grateful that the French Consul declined my offer, in case he was not satisfied, to do the thing again. The fact is, the operation, slight as it was, has weakened me a little. I wouldn't care to repeat the performance without a good night's rest to buck me up."

Von Herrnung shrugged and agreed:

"That it is cold at 10,000 I can credit easily. I have had the oil in my own gauges frozen at 7,000 in midsummer. *Da ist nicht zu strassen.* Hæmorrhage and dizziness are the chief enemies of the aviator. One's stomach betrays one also, the cursed beast!—after a good hearty meal!"

"I don't give mine the chance!" Sherbrand returned,

"but stave off the pangs of appetite with milk-tablets and meat-lozenges. Do all my flying on these and chocolate. Keep a little store of the things and a Thermos of hot coffee, in a *cache* I've made for them, under the map-desk on the left of the instrument-frame, facing the pilot's seat. If you will come over to the Bird I'll show you, and explain the working of the gyroscopic hoverer." He added, looking squarely at von Herrnung: "Of course the cutting of the double screw is the chief thing about the invention. I've registered every way I know and got a trade-mark. They tell me at the Patent Office that my international rights are secure!"

"They should be, if you have those precautions taken. It does not do to trust," said von Herrnung, "too much! The monkey proverb is law for most men." He shrugged. "It comes, by the way, from Namaland in German South-West Africa. '*Nuts in your pouch are nuts in mine!*'"

The freemasonry of their calling had established a degree of friendliness between them. They were laughing over the monkey's philosophy as they went over together to the Bird. The small boy who had been idly sprawling on the hot turf near them, with his tilted hat shielding his face from the westering sun-rays, got up and trotted after them like a collie pup."

"Coming too, young man?" Sherbrand said, glancing back and smiling. The boy nodded in answer, and thenceforward kept close at the heels of the men, his ears industriously drinking in their conversation, while his eyes were glued on the brown leather satchel depending from the German's gloved left hand. Both men, now leaning over the side of the pilot's cockpit, examined the gearing of the hoverer, protected by a transparent casing set in the tough ash, copper-riveted planking of the fuselage. Then with the aid of sulky Davis they tilted the Bird, and inspected the pair of thin circular plates of toughened steel with

flanged edges that, revolving at high velocity in different directions, constituted the horizontal screw.

"Driven from the engine, as you see, by an endless chain-drive arrangement. By manipulation of levers, you can throw the tractor out of gear, and hover, under favourable circumstances and in still weather, by means of the horizontal screw alone. But as a rule you keep the tractor working, and the screw acts in one as a lifter and floating-anchor. That's about all it amounts to!—I've said I don't pretend to hang immovable in the air like the albatross and the condor, not to mention the gull and sparrow-hawk and dragon-fly! While I hover I am making way—but way to an inappreciable amount. One of these days we shall find out the big Secret of Stability. Until then we must rub along as best we can!"

Von Herrnung returned:

"I am hellishly interested in your invention. It now occurs to me that as you happen to know my flying record"—he shrugged his great shoulders and smoothed his tight red roll of moustache with a well-manicured finger-tip—"that it is possible you would have sufficient confidence to allow me to test your gyroscopic hoverer myself?" He laughed again pleasantly as he finished: "Whatever else I may do, I give you my word of honour I shall not pile up your machine. Will you consent? It may lead—supposing you do not close with the French offer—to big business—done with my friends!"

Sherbrand had looked doubtful, only for an instant. Before the twelve-year-old eavesdropper had recovered from the shock that had set his brain spinning and his heart thumping, the situation had been accepted by the owner of the Bird of War. He held out his left hand, and von Herrnung gripped and wrenched it, noting with inward amusement that his grip had brought fresh lines of blood creeping about the edges of Sherbrand's finger-nails.

"You shake hands with the left," he commented, smiling.

"Not for the first time have I noticed the peculiarity in Englishmen of the younger breed."

"It is a custom," Sherbrand answered, "with—members of an organisation to which I had, and still have, the honour to belong."

His eyes, in speaking, went to the bright-haired boy in Scout's uniform standing near them, but von Herrnung's glance had not followed his. The boy was staring wistfully at the round-faced clock on the front gable of the café restaurant—ten minutes to the half-hour and no sign of the Chief's returning. Bawne's courage began to ooze away at the ends of his fingers and toes.

"Then," von Herrnung was beginning impatiently, when a sallow, undersized young man, whose hollow chest and inky paper cuffs advertised his clerical employment, came up, touched a pen sticking out from behind his ear, and said as Sherbrand turned to him:

"Beg pardon, sir, but the telegraph-cabin is locked up proper, and Mr. Macrombie 'as carried orf the key."

"Out of sorts to-day, is he?" Sherbrand asked meaningly, and the telegraph-clerk answered:

"I've never seen 'im so bad before—in the middle of the month!"

As Fate would have it, Macrombie, ex-Petty Officer Telegraphist of the R. N.—from whose sleeve the golden Crown and thunderbolt had been reft by reason of his anti-teetotal habits, had received a visit that morning from a friend who had repaid a debt. Hence the licensed operator of Fanshaw's experimental and educational Wireless-station had succumbed to an attack of his intermittent complaint.

Hear Macrombie's assistant continuing the recital:

"He's left the aërial connected to the transmitter and gone out for lemon-squashes four times since one o'clock grub. 'That's the drink for men who have souls to save, ye little fag-eater!' he says to me; 'Salvation for soul and body,

sucked through a straw! If thae deboshed and hopeless drunkards at the Admiralty could be induced to swear off their cursed alcohol and take to it, I wad no longer be deaved to the point of steeping my tongue in profanity, by the kind o' eediots' gibberish that is yammering at my lugs!'"

"He'd been raking a lot of Admiralty strays in?" Sherbrand queried. Von Herrnung, who had been grinding his heel into the turf and gnawing his lip with ill-concealed impatience, turned his head sharply, and listened to the colloquy with all his ears.

"Not so much X's as definites, sir," responded Macrombie's assistant. "He was upset about ten minutes before he broke out by getting an 'Urgent' without a Preparative Call. Then comes 'Important' in International Code, and 'Administration' and 'Emergency.' Then 'War Office,' and 'Documents,' and 'Enforcement of the Law.' By that time 'e was purple in the face and 'arf crazy. 'If I had my way wi' you, ye bung-nosed intemperates,' he says, groaning-like—'I wad keep ye on grits an' caller watter for a fortnicht! Oh, that men, as auld Hosea says in the inspired Screeptures'—an' I 'appen to know myself it was Shakespeare—'should pit an enemy intil their mooths to steal awa' their brains!' An' 'e snatches off the telephone 'ead-band and chucks it into the corner, and just as my own instrument starts to tick out a call, he ketches me by the neck as if I'd bin a tame rabbit, an' slings me out o' the office an' locks the door. 'Out o' this!' 'e says, puttin' the cabin key in 'is pocket. 'I will no' have your lugs, dirr-ty as they are, polluted by the unclean counsels o' the wicked. I'm awa' to cool the wrath o' the righteous wi' anither lemon squash!' An' the winder is blocked by the Morse key instrument, an' even if it wasn't, it's too small for me to get in through!" Macrombie's victim ended, with an injured sniff.

"Well, well! Better hang about the cabin a bit and

possess your soul in patience. If any pupils drop along, tell them they'll have to wait! Perhaps Macrombie'll turn up sober enough to take them on by-and-by. As for the message in transmission, I daresay it will keep. Mr. Fanshaw's not expecting any particularly important communication that I know of. Oh, hang it!" Sherbrand whistled dismally. "I'd forgotten. That's just what I *am!*"

"Shall I go and see if I can find Rumball?" suggested Macrombie's assistant helpfully. "He's at the engine-sheds. He's been a locksmith. 'Twouldn't take him more than a sec. to open the office door!"

"Cut then!" acceded Sherbrand, and the telegraph-clerk touched his pen—discovering by a jab of the inky nib that he was wearing it—and set off at a trot in the direction of the engine-sheds.

You are to suppose that von Herrnung's sharp ears had gathered the pith of the communication. Some meaning in the isolated words the clerk had repeated had had a palpable effect upon his nerves. His face looked bluish-grey and streaky, as he said to Sherbrand, stammering in his eagerness:

"So then, it is agreed about my flying your machine?"

"I see no objection."

"*Gut!*" Von Herrnung went on, concealing a huge joy under a careless camaraderie: "Can you lend me a cap and coat and a pair of *Schutzbrille?* Goggles you call them, yes! The coat should better to be a large one"—he stumbled in his English now through sheer excitement—"I am so much a bigger man than you!"

"Certainly. We keep Flying rigs in all manner of sizes. It's in the way of business," Sherbrand said. Then his glance fell upon Davis, whose little black-avised countenance wore an expression of sulky resentment, and he uttered a slight exclamation. "I forgot, Davis! I really am very sorry!" He turned to von Herrnung and explained in a tone of finality that enraged the hearer:

"This is Davis's afternoon off. I cannot ask him to repeat the climb."

"It is hellishly annoying! But see! Listen, my fellow!" He addressed himself to little grimy Davis, unhelmeted and unbuttoned, leaning against the Bird's flank with his hands in the pockets of his oily overalls, chewing a blade of grass; "You will go up with me if I tip you? A sovereign! Come then! The gold does it! You will go up with me, will you not, yes?"

Davis spat out grass and delivered himself:

"Not even for my young guv'nor—and a Bank of England finnup, do I do the soaring heagle hact again this blooming Wednesday."

Welsh Davis had come to London from a mountain farm in Merioneth, speaking nothing but his native Cymric, and had culled his Sassenach from Cockney lips. Von Herrnung bid another sovereign, and then two more, ineffectually.

"Naow!" Davis was rock. "I've done my day's stunt an' I'm nuffy. D'yer tumble? Nuffy! Yer knaows wot that means—if you're a Flying Bloke!"

"Damn you, I will gif you ten pounds!" Von Herrnung's face was wrung and streaked with passion. He breathed hard, and the brown leather satchel jumped and wobbled in his shaking hand.

"It isn't any use," said Sherbrand, "really! Money doesn't count with Davis where his off-time's concerned. Davis doesn't want to go up again, and I've not another man of his weight available. What do you turn the scale at? I should guess 16 stone or thereabouts?"

"I weigh 16 st. 8 lbs. in my ordinary clothes."

"Well, I tot 11 st. 6 lbs. in the fullest of flying-rig, and Davis only 8 st. 5 lbs. And the Bird is built to carry in addition to her engine—what with the instruments, so forth, and man-freight, a cargo of something like 22 stone. You see, even with Davis, you'd load the machine a good bit over her"—he smiled at the conceit—"her Plimsoll mark.

Again, I'm sorry. It's your luck! No flying for you to-day!"

"It is damnably annoying! But"—von Herrnung's red-lashed blue eyes were busily scanning Bawne's face and figure—"but suppose I could get a boy of 6 stone to go up with me? Merely as ballast, for I do not require an assistant—the difficulty might be got over in this way? What you say, my little English fellow?" He turned on the boy with a great air of jovial patronage. "Are you plucky enough? Shall we go for a voyage together in the sky?"

"Yes—please!"

The dark blue eyes met the hard light ones bravely, though every vestige of colour had sunk out of the young face. Then back to lips and cheeks the banished colour came racing. Bawne flushed crimson, as von Herrnung held up a bright bit of gold, and sharply shook his head.

"*Was?* Will you not take the sovereign?" von Herrnung demanded. "Are you a faint-heart after all?"

The boy bit his lip and said, clenching his small fists desperately:

"It's against the rule for Scouts to take tips. So I don't want the money. But I'm ready to come with you!"

"Look here, old fellow!" Sherbrand was beginning anxiously. The boy stopped him with:

"Really and truly I'm not funky—and you said I was to have another flight."

"So I did, and so you shall," agreed Sherbrand. "But this won't be just a 'bus trip around the aërodrome. It will be climbing and spiralling and hovering, and all the rest!"

Bawne persisted:

"You could strap me in. And I'm not afraid—really!"

"And," von Herrnung interposed, "I shall not ascend higher than three thousand. Probably less will do for my purpose. The boy will be quite safe. Surely you are able to trust him with me?"

Sherbrand hesitated, then said to Bawne in a relieved tone:

"Well, there's the Doctor talking to a tall lady in white with a hat that glitters. Run across to your father and ask him whether you may go?"

"I'd rather you asked him—if you must—and let me stop here!"

"*Gut! Sehr gut!*" Von Herrnung's tautened nerves would have been relieved by some hard Prussian swearing. He jangled out a laugh instead. He caught hold of the boy under the armpits and lifted him high above his head. "What is your weight? Six stone? Come now, have I not guessed nearly!" He had not relinquished his grip on the leather satchel, and as it banged against his ribs, Bawne realised that it was quite light.

"Papers inside!" he said to himself. Something quite hard was under the leather at the corners, perhaps the thinnest of metal plates. Its contact with the boy's body seemed to sober von Herrnung's exultation. He dropped Bawne unceremoniously, and straightened himself again.

"How much petrol has been used?" he asked hastily of Davis, going over to the Bird and mounting on the landing-carriage to look at the gauges. "Because when I fly I never take risks. You will have to fill up the tank again. Do you hear, my fellow?"

"If Mr. Sherbrand orders me," Davis spat out another piece of grass, "dessay I shall do it!" He eyed von Herrnung with surly disapproval as he craned over the Bird's fuselage, while audibly commenting to an acquaintance who had strolled up:

"Sheer blinders, I call 'em, these ere Fritzies! Walk into Buckingham Pallis next minute and ask to look into the Privy Puss. 'Ope the Governor comes back before 'e gits Nosey Parkerin' into the 'orizontal 'overing gear! Perish me if I ever met a bloke with such a nerve! Watto, old sonny?" He addressed himself to the boy. "Ain't you feelin' up to the posh?"

"I am quite all right, thank you!" Bawne responded,

while his heart bumped against his ribs. In his brain words and sentences kept forming:

"I'm only a little chap. And this is—a Big thing! Bigger than the Chief expected, perhaps! And he said he'd be back in half an hour." Half an hour meant thirty minutes. He glanced at the big round white-faced clock above the entrance of the café restaurant. More than fifteen minutes of the half-hour had gone.

To stick to the big, brutal German was his—Bawne's—Secret Mission. And the inspiring, uplifting voice that thousands of boy-hearts thrill to all the big world over had said to him:

"Quit yourself like a man!"

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE REAPING

To Patrine, when the shadow of the familiar figure of the Doctor mingled with hers upon the dry green grass, and Saxham's voice called her by her name, it was as though his presence had a weight that physically oppressed her, and his scrutiny seared her flesh like the approach of white-hot iron.

Through her mind passed swift sentences: "*Yet another of us has disgraced him! My father and mother are not the only traitors of our name!*" In the rawness of her mental anguish every sense was unnaturally exaggerated. The ticking of Saxham's watch, that the furious beating of her heart could not drown, tormented by its iteration. And worst of all, was the consciousness of defilement in the physical sense.

"Did not your mother give you my message?"

Always pale, her pallor did not demand particular attention, save that under their ruddy salve the edges of her lips showed white. She answered, forcing the lips to smile, compelling her eyes to meet Saxham's.

"About coming to see you?" She remembered and drew from her gilt-chain vanity bag the letter she had not posted: "This was written to you to-day. Then I thought I would have been able to look in at Harley Street, and in the end——"

"In the end you neither paid the visit nor posted the excuse. Well, be more considerate in future to those who love you. Sincere, clean love does not grow on every gooseberry bush, my dear!"

The curt speech, made in the Doctor's brusquest tone,

conveyed to Patrine an impression of exquisite kindness. So many boons, so many benefits had been conferred in that grim, curt way. She had wept and would not weep again, but her hard bright eyes grew misty as she thanked him, and asked after Lynette, with a touch of wistfulness that recalled to the Doctor that unforgettable time when greedy Death had threatened to rob him of his joy. He answered her cheerfully, and they found themselves chatting of familiar, everyday matters across the gulf that yawned between. And then, warned by some swift change of expression in her face, Saxham glanced up to see Sherbrand approaching.

"Doctor!" he called. "Sorry to interrupt, but would you listen a minute?"

The tall, lightly-built, lightly moving figure came swinging towards them. He still carried the eared cap with the goggled visor, his thick, silvery-blonde hair was darkened at the temples with the dampness generated under the close covering of waterproof. His light grey-blue eyes were smiling, yet there was a pucker of anxiety between his eyebrows, as he put von Herrnung's case.

"So," he ended, "instead of taking a second flight in the Bird with me as we arranged, would you trust your boy to this foreign crack who's in a hole for a passenger? He is Captain von Herrnung of the German Flying Service—winner of the two-days' flight from Hanover to Paris in April—a famous run!" He added, "I need hardly say that with such a record as von Herrnung holds you cannot be apprehensive of any rashness or neglect on his part. But I'll own I would rather take Bawne up another day myself. Still, von Herrnung——"

"I am aware of the reputation held by the person you mention. I am going now to speak to him."

The Doctor's face was devoid of all expression. But he battled, as he spoke, with a masterful desire to forbid

Bawne the expedition. To assert parental authority on this point would have been the mode of dealing approved by one of the two men who dwelt within the Dop Doctor. The other Saxham said "Hold!"

Dare you place your paternal love, that other Saxham asked—between your son and his duty? Because it would be so easy to do it, is the reason why you should refrain! The Doctor had walked a few paces towards the object of his troubled reflections. He wheeled abruptly, returned, and presented Sherbrand to his niece.

A faint blush rose in Patrine's white cheeks as her eyes met those of the tall young aviator. They looked at her without any sign of recognition, and the conviction, "*He has forgotten!*" shot stingingly across her mind. "*He did not think me worth remembering*" came next. And then she could have laughed, recalling that she had dismissed him from her own thoughts on the discovery of his connection with Fanshaw's. She had made so certain that a teacher of Flying couldn't be a gentleman.

Now, face to face with him again, in his upright easy bearing, in his straight and fearless regard, in the pleasant well-bred voice that addressed her in a brief conventional sentence or so, she read his patent of gentlehood.

From whatever root it sprang, the flower was noble. Her swift eyes shot a glance at the bigger figure in grey. What a hoggish knight of the dunghill, what a high-born clown had she not distinguished by her choice and selection. The smile of scorn that curved her mouth was suddenly banished by the sudden recollection of Bawne.

"Uncle Owen, you have not yet told Mr. Sherbrand whether Bawne may go up again or not. I am sure—if you won't think me—if you don't mind my saying so!—that he has had enough for to-day! I think it would be better if you would not——"

It was not the deep warm voice of Patrine's characteristic

utterance, but a weaker, thinner voice that hesitated and faltered and trailed away. It recalled nothing to Sherbrand. He looked at her and transferred his gaze to Saxham, who asked:

"Does this German officer intend climbing to any high altitude, or perpetrating anything in the nature of a display?"

Sherbrand explained:

"He does not want to go higher than three thousand. Just to try the hoverer, regarding which some business friends of his are bitten with curiosity. My mechanic is not able to go up with him, and he wants a light-weight passenger. He is over sixteen stone himself, and the Bird has been built to carry me with Davis. I calculated her wing-area to——"

Sherbrand travelled into the realm of technicalities, using terms that were Volapuk and Esperanto to Patrine. He had supple, finely-shaped hands, and used them as he talked with vivid illustrative gestures.

"So," he ended, "as your plucky youngster asked to go, it seemed a way out of the difficulty, provided you weren't dead against the thing. Of course we'll swadd the little chap in a sweater or so under the pneumatic jacket. It'll be a bit parky, even at three thousand, now the sun's beginning to down."

He added:

"I'll see to the strapping myself. You may rely upon it, Doctor."

Saxham said with a look of kindness at the handsome face with the clear candid eyes:

"I am sure of that!" He added, mastering that inward impulse: "I shall not forbid the flight if Bawne is set on it. But first, I must speak to him!"

And the great form with the stern thoughtful face and scholar's stoop moved across the greensward, followed by the tall young figures of Sherbrand and Patrine. Of the

two, the man was by a bare inch the taller. This Patrine realised in a swift side-glance. Certain featural characteristics of him, personal impressions received half-unconsciously, retained their clear sharpness then and for many days. . . .

The silvery-yellow hair toning into the pale brown skin. The powerful sweep of the brows over eyes set flush with their large orbits, prominent, brilliant, mobile as the eyes of a bird of flight. The nose, arched and jutting like a kite's beak, with large sensitive nostrils, the somewhat sunken cheek and the sharply-angled jaw, the little ear and the rounded skull superbly set upon the full muscular neck rising out of the collar of the gabardine, made up a portrait upon which some happy woman might well dote and dream.

It was five o'clock and the breeze that smelt of heather and clover-hay and strawberries blew more strongly, straight from under the westering sun. Patrine drank in deep draughts of the buoyant sweetness. The leaden gyves had fallen from her limbs, the leaden weight had lifted from her bosom. She had recovered something of her old, elastic grace of movement, that even the sheath-skirt could not spoil. Looking at her, Sherbrand said to himself:

"She walks like a Highland hill-woman or a native girl of the Philippines. And—did Heaven or a Bond Street specialist give her that extraordinary hair? I rather hate it, and yet I have to go on looking at it. Does she know? I wonder if she knows?"

She felt his eyes on her. And the buoyant sense of well-being that his presence brought to her was mingled with an agony of apprehension. Her heart clamoured, like a brooding thrush attacked by the owl, that Bawne should not be permitted to risk himself with von Herrnung. "*Does any other living being know him as I know him?*" she asked herself. "*If by some misadventure it came to a question of*

*one life or the other, would he scruple—no ! he would not scruple for an instant to sacrifice the child ?"*

Three words to Uncle Owen—if one only dared to speak them—would have put the thing out of the question. But at the thought of the dreadful avowal to which such an utterance might lead, Patrine was stricken dumb. She could not face the music. This was one little ear of wild oats out of the full field that waited for her reaping, sown in the hours that lie between the midnight of pleasure and the dawn of the Day of Remorse.

Perhaps she and Sherbrand had walked more slowly than it had seemed to her. She saw Saxham and his son meet, heard, indistinctly the exchange of a few brief sentences, and then the boy, with a jump to hug his father round the neck, ran to her as she came up.

"Cousin Pat, I'm going to get into my flying-kit in a minute." His heart was thumping so that it shook him, and the short upper lip with the gold-brown dust of freckles on it quivered, hard as he tried to keep it stiff: "One doesn't do it before people generally—but I'd rather like you to kiss me now!"

"My precious, a dozen times!"

She said it impetuously in the deep womanly baritone that Bawne loved, and Sherbrand started as he heard it. She dropped her tall-sticked sunshade, and caught the little boyish figure to her broad womanly bosom, hugged him until he panted, and kissed his pale cheeks red. You do not need to be reminded that Patrine was a galumpher. "Don't go! don't go!" she whispered in her darling's neck. "I hate your going! and I don't believe Uncle Owen likes it. . . . Say you've been up once and you're 'nuffy! Pretend you funk it. Do, for my sake!"

"I—can't. Ouch! You tickle! Please let me go. This is business!" He squirmed, and she burst out laughing, and released him. The act was a wrench that tore her bleeding heart anew.

He bounded instantly after Sherbrand, seeing him go forward to join von Herrnung, who was standing watching Davis fill the Bird's tank with petrol, and her reservoir with oil.

There was no spurring these lazy devils of English into movement. . . . The accursed pig-dogs, the stupid sheep's heads! If that fragmentary Wireless message had really to do with *the business*, within the next ten minutes everything might be ruined. One walked perilously, as amongst pebbles, holding a watch-glass of High Explosive in one's hand. Here came the man and the boy. He joined them with a noisy burst of forced laughter. Presently you saw all three moving in the direction of a building where the "flying-kits of all sorts and shapes and sizes," of which Sherbrand had boasted, were kept for the use of the patrons of Fanshaw's School. As they went in, Bawne cast a wistful glance up at the clock on the front gable of the café restaurant, now supplying afternoon tea served in brown teapots, and rolls and butter on thick white platters, to a thin sprinkling of customers.

"Three minutes to the half-hour," said the clock.

Would the Chief come, or must this thing be carried out by a small boy whose heart lay, a palpable lump of cold lead in the pit of his stomach, and whose knees were turning to jelly as he went?

If Cousin Pat, when she begged him not to go, had known how badly he, Bawne, had wanted to hold her round the neck and beg her not to let him, he would at this moment have been unheroically safe.

She was so big. He had most dreadfully wanted to cling to her and cry—imagine a fellow of twelve doing anything so kiddish. But he had swallowed the unmanly tears, and wriggled out of her strong protecting arms.

He looked back and saw her tall white figure, standing near the hulking black-clad shape of the Doctor, who had pulled his hat-brim low down over his eyes, and did not

seem to be talking or laughing at all. Davis was doing something with a spanner to the Bird's under-carriage, and the long, thin shadow of her in combination with the squat shadow of the little stooping Welshman, stretched eastwards over the dry green grass.

He heaved a big sigh and followed his man in. Von Herrnung was already trying on pneumatic coats, swearing in nervous German when they were not big enough. At last he was caparisoned, in a heavy suit of flannel-lined Carberrys and a buttonless hooded jacket. He had stripped the burst glove from his wounded hand, thrown it away, and replaced the magpie pearl ring upon his little finger. He had put on a woollen helmet and tied over that a flapped cap with goggles and ear-pieces. While he attended to his outfit, the leather satchel lay at his feet, or sometimes between them, or he would keep a boot-toe on a corner of it. And his hard blue eyes were vigilantly watchful against surprise.

Sherbrand and the dresser—who presided over a long room of shelves and pegs laden with queer garments, and who looked like a washed mechanic in spotless blue overalls—put Bawne into a woollen sweater, and added to the panoply he had worn already that morning, and which consisted of leggings, slip-strapped to a webbing waistbelt, a pneumatic jacket, a knitted helmet such as von Herrnung wore, and a pair of goggles. They looked like the Eskimo hunter and his little boy in the "Book of The Arctic"—a volume specially beloved of Saxham's small son.

It was five minutes past the half-hour when they emerged from the dressing-shed. Saxham came to meet them, turned and walked by his son's side. Davis, whose weakness as regards the sex we know, had pinched from the visitor's enclosure a green-painted iron chair for Patrine. She half-rose, stung by an impulse of escape, when she saw von Herrnung approaching, and then controlled herself and sat down again.

Nothing escaped her long eyes. They saw Sherbrand glance from Saxham to von Herrnung, and read the intention of an introduction in his look. He had just begun:

"Doctor, I don't think you have met Captain——" when von Herrnung lengthened his long stride, outstripped his companions, and went over swiftly and stood beside Patrine.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### VON HERRNUNG BAITS THE HOOK

SHE knew that he had interpreted her movement as an invitation.

He saluted her and said, speaking thickly:

"It is necessary that I have a word with you. Walk with me for one moment. I shall not keep you more!"

He bulked huge in his rig-out, but looked thoroughly at home, and deadly workmanlike. He pushed up his goggles as though conscious that they discounted his personal attractions, and his blue eyes were stony and glittering, and his full mouth showed pale and hard-set under the scarlet roll of his moustache.

"I shall not see you again to-day, and I have something important to tell you." He spoke rapidly and his breathing was harsh and loud. "I have been recalled by my Chiefs and return to Germany in—another two or three days. That we do not meet again before I leave is possible, therefore I wish to give you my address."

She did not look up. A white hand with red hairs growing thick on the back of it offered her a pencilled card. She made no movement to take it. He said, thrusting the card underneath her eyes:

"It is printed here in German letters. You read and speak my language badly, so I will translate for you—'Squadron-Captain-Pilot Count Theodor von Herrnung, Imperial Field Flying Service, Flight Station XXX., Taubefeld, near Diebrich, West Hessen, Germany.' Write your letter to me in English. The address copy from this. Will you not take the card?"

"There is no need to. I do not mean to write to you!"

"*Danke.* You are candid," he said, "at least. You give me to understand that whatever happens—" he repeated the words with a singular inflection "*whatever happens!*—you will have no more to do with me?"

"Have I not told you so twice already?"

He gritted his teeth and said, controlling furious anger:

"*Erklären Sie! Was giebt es?* Why are you so—rottenly furious with me? You have yourself to thank for—what has happened! You led me on. You made me crazy about you. And the devil of it is I am so still! The sight of you maddens me! Listen! Do not be stupid—unkind to yourself and to me! In three days from now, you will get an envelope at your Club with plenty of money. Join me at my headquarters at Taubefeld and then—you will see! We will be happy—you shall have plenty of money to throw about when we visit Berlin and other big cities, and jewels, dresses, pleasure, admiration—everything a beautiful woman wants! *Grosse Gott!* Can I offer anything more tempting? What are you saying? 'Yes!' or 'No!'"

Her narrowed eyes looked like long black slits in her white face. The pale lips barely moved to answer:

"Neither! Are you proposing to marry me?"

He laughed woodenly, and repeated:

"Marry you! Ha, ha! What *verdammt* nonsense are you talking? What has love to do with getting married? Nothing that I have ever heard! Of course I shall marry—my family have arranged all that for me. But my Countess will not interfere with my mistress—that I promise you! Come, be kind, my beautiful Isis! Whisper now that you agree!"

He bent his head to hear. The whisper came from the pale lips:

"I will see you in Hell first!"

He started, taken aback. Her own utterance had shocked her. "Am I a street-walker already," she asked herself, "that I begin to curse and swear?"

A whistle trilled. He started and said:

"So then, all is over between us?"

She bent her head assentingly, and her glance fell guiltily on Bawne who was standing near. Von Herrnung, aware of him at the same instant, turned on him with a scowl and the harsh demand:

"What is this? Do little English boys pry and listen?"

Bawne returned, looking at the other squarely:

"Beg pardon, but Mr. Sherbrand's calling you. He says it's getting jolly late."

"*So!*" Von Herrnung glanced at his wrist-watch, in the act lifting the brown leather satchel into fullest view. The boy queried with open-eyed innocent curiosity:

"Shall I carry that? Are you going to take it with you?"

"*Es mag wohl sein*," von Herrnung answered. Then he clicked his heels and bowed formally, and kissed Patrine's cold and heavy hand. She felt his teeth grit as he did it. She knew he was swearing in his way.

"Adieu, then," he said, smiling at her maliciously. "Will you not wish me *Angenehme Reise?*"

"Certainly. A pleasant voyage, and a safe landing!" Her eyes fell on Bawne's little, oddly garbed figure and her woman's heart spoke in spite of her. "Take care of my dearest!" broke from her, and von Herrnung answered:

"He is your dearest? Ah yes! I will certainly take very good care of him!"

He bowed, wheeled about and walked from her with his long strides, and the boy, with a face all flushed and quivering, suddenly jumped at her neck and hugged her; bringing with the rough little embrace the queer scent of waterproofed material and dubbined leather, knocking the silver-spangled hat awry, loosening divers tortoiseshell hairpins and an amethyst slide-buckle holding up the heavy tresses of the dead beech-leaf coloured hair, as he whispered:

"Remember I love you, Pat. Don't mind!"

And she shuddered as he freed her, and ran from her.

asking herself: How much had the child overheard of von Herrnung's proposal? What had he comprehended of what he had heard?

Next, she was aware of the pleasant voice of Sherbrand calling, and saw von Herrnung imperiously beckoning. A cold sickness of dread assailed her, and her knees trembled underneath her weight. A mechanic came running past, carrying away the chair Davis had brought her. He set it down at a safe distance from the aëroplane, and she staggered to it, leaning on the long staff of her sunshade, and sat heavily down, feeling chilly and old. . . .

Saxham had squeezed Bawne's shoulder and kissed him, and then withdrawn to a distance whence he could see all that took place. He watched Davis and Sherbrand help the boy into the forward cockpit, and fasten about him the safety belt attached to the fuselage on either side of the fixed bamboo seat.

"You are sure you really want to fly again? Mind, I believe you're as safe with him as houses, but if you don't want to go, say the word, and you shan't!"

Sherbrand whispered the words as he busied himself with the boy. And Bawne set his small teeth and squared his sturdy boyish shoulders, registering an unspoken vow to go in spite of all. . . .

One had been told to drop a word to Sherbrand if one found oneself in a tight place. But could one ever hold up one's head again before the Patrol, if one did this? To share one's Mission with another when the Chief had said "I'd rather you'd carry through on your own" wasn't to be thought of. Mother—he swallowed hard at the thought of her—would say so too.

It troubled his faithful little soul that he could no longer see von Herrnung. He heard him talking in his guttural English, to Davis, whom Bawne could not see either—as

he stood near the nose of the machine, in readiness to start the tractor—any more than the two mechanics who steadied the Bird, pressing each a toe on the axle of the under-carriage as they held on to a steel rod that ran along under the rearward edges of her single plane.

His final directions sharply given, von Herrnung stepped up on the under-carriage, threw a long leg over the bulwark of the fuselage, and stepped into the pilot's pit. Bawne screwed his head round and saw, through and over a low talc wind-shield, the upright torso of the German, big, hard, and indomitable, the leather satchel still gripped in his strapped-up left hand.

"Are you going to take that leather case along with you?" Sherbrand's voice had a note of surprise in it. "You'll find it a handicap, let me say. You can't sit on it or lean against it, and if you tried to put it under you, you'd find it dead-certain to foul the controls."

To Sherbrand's voice, von Herrnung's answered harshly and rather angrily:

"Surely I shall be able to carry this? It is nott-thing but a folding camera, with a telephoto lens made especially for Survey and Reconnaissance. There is still a good light. If I fly with the sun behind me, I shall be able to take quite a panorama of London North-West. It is not forbidden —no? Your Government would not object?"

"I don't suppose my Government would care a little hang!" Sherbrand's voice answered. "But—this isn't one of your German Army Albatros's or Kondors, and I don't see where you're to stow your camera, unless in the observer's pit. Of course the hovering installation takes up a lot of room, and I can't possibly risk your hampering the controls."

"*Ganz recht!* Very good!" came von Herrnung's voice, giving in with simulated heartiness. In another moment his long legs, followed by his great body, came scrambling into the forward cockpit, and his hands busied themselves

about the stout belt of pig-leather that secured the boy in the observer's seat.

"Look here, my fellow! You will take care of this for me? See, I have passed the belt-strap through the handle. Do not touch it!" The guttural whisper had menace in it. "I shall be sure to know if you touch it, or try to unbuckle the strap."

"What's up?" Sherbrand's head and shoulders came thrusting over the other side of the cockpit. "Why did you unstrap him?" he demanded brusquely of von Herrnung. "Don't you know that he is my friend's son, and that it is my business to see to this?" Sherbrand's hand felt over Bawne's belts and bucklings before his head and shoulders vanished. Then von Herrnung's big body withdrew itself. His voice, sounding from the pilot's pit on the other side of the low wind-shield, gave a peremptory order, and the tractor began slowly to revolve. An instant later, with a blinding flash, it began to roar and whizz round furiously. The Bird, freed from the hands that detained her, leaped forwards, hurtling over the smooth turf at the speed of a racing motor-car. The smooth floor of the cockpit unexpectedly tilted up, and a rough cold wind buffeted Bawne about the head and shoulders, sent eddies down about his dangling feet, bellowed in his covered ears and made him gasp for breath. Then—houses and people, trees, and hangars fell suddenly away, and he knew that the Bird was rushing upwards at the bidding of its "Gnome" motor —long superseded now, but then the latest marvel in aërial engineering—towards the blue sky with its lines of gilt mackerel clouds. On each side of the roaring, flashing whirl that meant the tractor, spread North Middlesex, with its fields fast diminishing to the size of billiard tables. That patch no bigger than a garden-lawn, with a row of wooden things like dog-kennels and chicken-coops, must be —Bawne knew that it was—the aërodrome. Deafened by the noise and a little sick, for the roaring, striving,

hurtling Thing in whose body he sat fastened, stank horribly of castor oil, and seemed to agonise and call on Bawne to suffer with it—he looked up and took courage from the warm, blue, beautiful, cheerful sky.

He was quitting himself like a man. Nobody could say otherwise. How high, how much higher was the Bird going to climb?

## CHAPTER XXXII

### ADVENTURE IN THE AIR

He looked down, and under his feet, left of the long transparent case that housed the horizontal hovering gear, was a little steel-framed glass port. Seen through this, the ground with its trees, fields and houses, hurried along beneath him as though a comet, travelling in the opposite direction, had been harnessed to our old earth, and was towing her away.

The floor of the cockpit suddenly altered its angle. It had tilted upwards. Now it tilted all to one side. Sick and dizzy, but secure, the boy hung in his straps as she lay over, and saw on his left hand a wing of the Bird rising and blotting out the heavens, while on his right hand the earth reared up so horribly that Bawne could only shut his eyes tight and hold on to the arms-straps of his seat, and gasp out a little prayer. Then the cockpit floor became more level, and the wind buffeted less. The roar of the tractor and the twanging drone of the wires made one's bones hum and tingle to the very ends of one's teeth and finger-tips. But nothing had happened. Perhaps nothing would!

He drew a great breath of relief, and his heart left off bumping. His mouth was cold inside and his tongue felt dry and stiff. Only Our Lord and Our Lady and his guardian Angel had seen him funky, and for this Bawne was grateful. They understood, and—people—would not.

He guessed it about a quarter to six o'clock. By the genial warmth on one cheek and shoulder, and the way his shadow stretched over the pale grained ash-wood that lined the cock-pit, he knew the west must be upon the left.

He raised himself, craning his neck, and through the low

wind screen behind him, against the background of a sky all flaming and boiling with molten gold and liquid amber, he saw the wide square shoulders and tall helmeted head of von Herrnung, the hard eyes staring unflinchingly through their round glass goggles, the mouth set in a straight inflexible line under the tight red roll of the moustache.

The red-moustached mouth opened, and von Herrnung shouted something. Nothing reached the boy but a sort of muffled roar. He shook his head vigorously, and then—one does not wear the Signaller's Badge for nothing!—released a stiff little gloved hand from its grip on the arm-rest, and rapped out with his clenched right fist on the edge of the fuselage:

"*I—can't—hear!*"

The Code was understood. The helmeted head, some four feet distant, nodded. One of von Herrnung's gauntleted hands freed itself from the steering-bar. Its knuckles drubbed out the question:

"Have you the brown satchel?"

Bawne had quite forgotten the brown satchel. He screwed back his head and looked down and there it was, lying on the numb knees of him, buckled to him by the tough strap of pigskin that held him in his seat. He nodded assent, and signalled:

"All right!"

"Good!" von Herrnung signalled back through the hurly-burly of the Bird's transit. Bawne mustered courage to knock out:

"Where are we? When shall we go down?"

Von Herrnung's right hand lifted itself, and described a sweeping half-circle. The brusque gesture answered Bawne's first question, bidding him look and see.

The boy, impeded in his view by reason of his small proportions, wriggled in his straps so as to get his chin well over the gunwale of the Bird's fuselage and the buffetting wind that was dug up and spaded over her bows by the

dizzying revolutions of the tractor, got hold of him and pummelled and buffetted him again. Her course was still north, the sun was setting in great smoking lakes of gold and sulphur on her left as she flew. Thick patches of dark green bushes that probably were woods, reddish-green blotches that might be heathy commons, shiny, square patches that he guessed at as reservoirs, toybox villages that were thriving suburban boroughs, specks that were villas, glittering ribbons that suggested canals, and one broad shiny stripe that was a river with tiny boats upon it, were swirling from right to left, sweeping along in the opposite direction, under the rushing body of the winged thing that bore him, ruled by the hand of von Herrnung upon the steering-wheel.

Behind her a chaotic, formless greyness brooded on the horizon, innumerable spires rose out of it and a glittering haze hung over all. That was London, the great grimy Mother of Cities tearing away from her little son at eighty miles an hour. The shriek of an engine and the rumble of a train reduced by distance to infinite tenuity pulled the boy's eyes downwards. A weeny mechanical toy that meant one of the double-humped colossi of steam traction, dragging a string of match-box goods trucks, raced another locomotive, towing a crowded passenger-train neck and neck along the spider-fine perspective of gossamers that meant the Great Eastern Railway. Now fear was swamped in the sheer joy of the experience. This thin air that kept you perpetually gulping and swallowing saliva, made you feel more than ever how good it is to be alive.

Billows and billows of green, interspersed with patches of purple heather, meant Epping Forest, though he did not know it. A great aggregation of grey walls and housetops, looking like a section of an old wasp's nest, stood for Waltham Abbey as the Bird drove on. Quite a tangle of the shiny grey-blue streaks that were rivers meant Lea and Orwell, Ouse, and their trouty tributaries. East England

rolled away underneath like an endless carpet woven in irregular patches of many hues. Green and brown, grey and yellow, and innumerable shades of these, so tempting in their suggestions of good things to eat that a most unheroic hunger reminded the schoolboy of tea-time, hours and hours gone by.

He looked round in search of von Herrnung, who maintained unchanged the same attitude, his shoulders level, his unseen hands steady as rock upon the wheel of the steering-pillar, his mouth shut tightly, his hard eyes ranging ahead or lowered, as he conned his course in masterly fashion by aid of the roller-map, protected by its transparent, rainproof casing, or the compass, clock, altimeter, and other instruments gimballed in the wooden frame in front of the pilot's seat.

"How long?" the small fist rapped out. Von Herrnung detached a hand and signalled in answer:

"One hour!"

"When do we go home?"

"We go home now!" the hand signalled, and the boy settled down in his seat to wait.

Between hunger and weariness he dozed, and soon slept soundly, his hands hanging laxly over the leather arm-rests and his head nodding over the brown satchel lying on his knees. It figured in his dreams as something huge, oppressive and uncanny, that suddenly took to itself malevolent life, spread a pair of wide leathery bat-wings, and would have flown away but that he gripped it fast.

"No, no! You shan't! I promised!" he heard himself crying, and suddenly the thing collapsed limply in his grasp and became nothing but a satchel, and he was awake. Awake and very stiff and rather sick and sleepy, and with the salt smell in his nostrils and the salt taste in his mouth that meant—that could only mean the Sea.

He looked over the gunwale and cried out in astonishment. For a vast carpet of rounded woolly-grey-white clouds lay spread beneath. The carpet beginning to rise and the cock-pit floor to incline downwards, a thin clammy fog suddenly blotted out everything. The Bird had dived through a field of woolpack mixed with ground-fog. Now flying some hundred feet beneath it, she regained her level, in the clear light stained by the sunset as water in which a dash of red wine is mingled, the light that is the aftermath of a radiant summer's day. And, with the smell of the sea sharper in his nostrils, the boy became aware of moving, muddy-grey water, with ships and boats and steamers on it, far down below.

Now the southerly breeze that had steadily tagged on some twenty-three miles an hour to the Bird's eighty odd, began to veer and come in strengthening puffs and gusts from the north-west. Swirling eddies of air came upwards from the water, rocking the machine as a swell takes a boat at sea, and splashed upon the frail, silk-covered wings of the aëroplane in deluges of invisible spray.

On the right hand and the left were wide stretches of muddy grey salt water, banks of sand, and drain-piped foreshore merging in patches of potato and swede and yellow squares of unripe corn. Clusters of white dots, where shingle and sea-walls bordered the drab, restless water, were fishing hamlets, villages and little coal-port towns. Upon the north bank, rapidly receding in distance, could be dimly sensed, beyond a dense fringe of masts standing close as pins in rows upon a pincushion, the oblongs and squares and rectilinears of docks and shipyards, stone quays, and piers and tide-basins, mixed up with blocks and streets of sheds and warehouses, stations and goods-yards, and huge, many windowed factories, whose towering chimneys yet belched forth thick black smoke-gouts, licked by red tongues of flame. Though even if the Saturday noon steam-siren had not silenced the throbbing of pneumatic

rivetting-hammers and the roaring of steam coal-shoots, hydraulic grain dischargers and oil-pumps, and all the hellish hubbub accompanying the huge export and import trade of Yorkshire and Lancashire with North Europe and the Continent, these sounds would not have reached the ears of the boy in the aëroplane save as a dull and muffled murmur, vaguely sensed, through the musical moaning of the stay-wires and the racket of the tractor-screw.

Now the sunset was behind. The land was rushing back upon the right and left-hand. The two-mile-wide river was broadening to a great estuary, vaster than the Thames, between Fort Victoria and Shoeburyness.

Long crawling strings of linked-up barges, sailing vessels of the old windjammer type and yachts of the latest rig, battered tramp and collier steamers, high-sided rusty looking oil-tankers, pilot-cutters, coastguard motor-launches, whole fleets of steam-trawlers, thrashed up and down its broad south side fairways or cannily negotiated the treacherous channels of the north bank. Ocean-going giants of the Merchant Service, flaunting the White Bordered Jack, or the Red Duster, or under Admiralty Warrant, displaying the Blue Ensign. Behemoths of the North Sea passenger-service showing the three-striped merchant-flag of Germany —or the tricolour of the Netherlands, or the Crosses of Norway, Sweden and Denmark—with more rarely some big grey armoured cruiser upon harbour and Coastal Defence Service, or a brace of stumpy, square-ended patrol-boats, or a trio of the stinging black hornets we have learnt to call torpedo-boat destroyers, ranging in company upon some business of the Powers that order Britannia's naval affairs.

Fascinating, wonderful to look down upon. Alike, however diverse in size, shape or uses, in the impression of flat unsubstantiality conveyed to you—together with the doubt that the emmets crawling upon them could possibly be life-sized men. A drifting daisy-petal meant a smart

private steam-yacht. You looked down from two thousand feet above, on the open-lidded snuffboxes that signified the fire-control and signalling-stations of some Leviathan of the Home Fleet, and a string of black holes jabbed in an oval of floating white millboard represented her funnels, black discs or white alternately stood for her ventilators; and her imposing deckworks, her turrets or barbettes, her gun-houses and casemates, and the terrible monsters blood-thirstily nosing out of them, were reduced to a more or less symmetrical arrangement in thick or thin black lines.

The rosy light was greying. The gusts came more fitfully. To the south, upon the right hand, were stone-built fortifications with black muzzles of big guns poking from the ramparts, over stretches of salty marsh, drab-coloured mud-flats, and slimy rocks covered with blackened seaweed, sticking up from pale silvery sand-shoals, licked by the restless white tongues of the outgoing tide, and bumped by stranding buoys. Black dots and grey dots wheeled and scurried and settled. Crows and gulls were feeding ravenously as the tide drew off the flats and sand-shoals. And by the queer sensation in his empty stomach, Bawne knew that he too was ravenous.

From the beaconed north shore of the vast estuary basin, edged now by low rambling cliffs, and belts of shingle and sand, a long curving headland with two lighthouses at the crook-end, rushed now towards the Bird at what seemed the speed of an express train. Bawne winced as the tall granite towers, topped with helmet-shaped domes of rust-red iron, rose up like twin giants threatening to destroy. An iron balcony with a flagstaff and signal-mast ringed the base of each dome-top, a stairway spiralled round each shaft to a railed stone platform well above high-water mark. And a shrimp-sized man in a red guernsey waved a speck of blue handkerchief, and bellowed a disproportionately loud greeting through what was presumably a megaphone. In reality the lighthouse-keeper was indicating the M. O. cone storm-

signal which hung point downwards from the west end of the yard-arm, presaging a south-west or north-westerly gale. Whether or no this warning was lost upon von Herrnung, proof of its value followed. For a great upleaping billow of brine-tasting wind caught the Bird as she flashed past the twin lighthouses upon the headland, tossing her upwards like a withered leaf. And a curved iron shutter in the nearer of the two rust-red dome-tops rolled down exactly as the nictitating membrane of a bird's eye does—and with a wink of glass from the prismatic reflector, a broad triple beam of blinding-white acetylene light leaped north, east and south. In the same instant upon each side of the flashing tractor, the boy sensed a vast, shimmering, liquid restlessness. Here was the Sea, the very Sea.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### BAWNE LEARNS THE TRUTH

SOMETHING in the blood of the child answered to the call of the Ancient Mother. He cried out, half in terror, half in delight, and the cockpit tilted so suddenly that he was violently jerked against the seat-back and the canvas bulkhead behind him. Looking up he saw a large old moon of luminous yellow, sailing away overhead through a sky all shot with pink and grey as though hollowed out of a fire-opal. The Bird was rushing through space at ninety miles an hour, and great lumps of cold salt wind splashed over Bawne and took his breath away, and his hands were numbed with bitter cold and his legs were legs of ice.

So brave a spirit dwelt in his little breast, that the sob that heaved it and the tears that stung his eyelids and dimmed his goggles, were swallowed and blinked away as soon as shed. The cockpit became level, and there was an imperious rapping behind him, on the upper canvas deck. He turned his head and met the hard unflinching stare of von Herrnung, who held in the hand with which he had rapped a bitten piece of chocolate. Still munching he signalled:

"Hungry?"

He smiled grimly as the boy nodded in the affirmative, stuffed the bit of sweetstuff into his mouth, produced from its *cache* below the level of the upper deck another square of chocolate, tore off the silver foil with his teeth, and crunched it greedily.

He smiled, because of a queer tickling pleasure he felt as he did this, akin to the sensation experienced when his taunts had tortured Patrine. "Take care of my dearest!"

he fancied he could hear her saying. . . . Not until she had committed herself to that incautious utterance, had he, von Herrnung, realised what rich vengeance on the desired, hated woman might be wreaked by the simple act of carrying off the boy, whom he had regarded until then as a mere bag of ballast; less useful, but certain to prove less troublesome, than the Cockney-tongued Welshman, who might or might not carry a cheap revolver in the hip-picket under his overalls with which to enforce his protest against being taken away.

Von Herrnung was himself armed with a Browning automatic pistol. A deadly shot, he would have been capable of dealing with half a dozen Davises upon the solid ground. But, no lover of avoidable risks, he saw himself steering with one hand and shooting with the other, while Davis sat astride the chair in the observer's cockpit, and argued with an eighteen-and-sixpenny Birmingham four-chamber, loaded with the cheap little cordite cartridges, whose pea-sized bullet can kill a fine big man.

"What is this? You are sick?"

Even while keeping his ears open and his eyes skinned, as he negotiated the Bird through a choppy cross-current, conning his course between the compass and the roller-chart-map, now illuminated by an electric bulb, his great shoulders shook with merriment as he saw the boy's head sink helplessly against the side of the fuselage, and his small body convulsed by throes of the sickness that is indistinguishable from the dismal malady of the sea. He had shut off the engine to shout to him. And in the sudden cessation of the tractor's racket, the deep organ note of the waters rolled in upon the hearing, mingled with the shrill piping of the wires and the ruffle of the freshening wind. As he switched on power once more, the broad white ray from the Bull Light leaped forth again and caught them as it ran eastwards over the tumbling white-crested billows, flinging a huge shadow of von Herrnung over the canvas-covered

space of deck before him and showing him to the white-faced boy who had twisted round once more to look at him, as a featureless human torso shaped out of solid ebony with diamond specks for eyes and gleams of grinning ivory teeth.

"When are we going home? Why are we over the sea now?"

Von Herrnung shut off again for the luxury of hearing and answering:

"I have told you because we are going home. Our home is—Germany. You will not be an English boy but German, once I have got you there!"

The shrill cry of anger that came from the open mouth of the white face was lost to him in the necessity of switching on the engine. He nodded pleasantly to the white face and, in the darkness of his own shadowy visage, there was the glimmer of a laugh. Then he applied himself to other business, for the tide would turn in an hour, and then the wind might blow hellishly from the nor'-west. Flying lower, he knew his course the true one, for the white head-light and green starboard-lights of a big steamer pricked twinkling holes in the thick grey dusk to northward on his port beam. He told himself she was one of the Elbe Company's big bluff-bowed liners making from Newcastle for Hamburg Docks. The stern-lights of a sister-ship hailing from Grimsby, by her steerings, were also discernible in the mirk ahead, while the lights from her tiers of cabins made her look like a black water-beetle with golden legs, hurriedly scuttling over the sea. Following the course of the Hamburg-bound liners, even if one failed to make connection with one's accredited pilot, it would not be long before one picked up Borkum Riff Lightship and in due course, spiring silver grey against the pink-and-golden sunrise—the twin towers of Nordeich Wireless—marking the journey's end.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE BROWN SATCHEL

THE journey's end. A gust, tearing the mist that veiled the livid waters, showed the shadowy shapes of a procession of battleships, steaming southwards in single line.

You see the German assailed by the wind, now hard on the aëroplane's port beam, craning over, counting the speedlights passing diagonally underneath. Eight steel Leviathans, stabbing bright points of electric light through fog and funnel-smoke, with an effect of diamonds seen against a background of dull grey plush.

Eight rushing, neutral-tinted shapes—conveying a formidable impression of grim power, and force, and ruthlessness. A Squadron of Battle Cruisers of the British Home Fleet, new from the brine of Lerwick Waters, or the fierce green surges of Scapa Flow. Bound for Harwich Roads or Sheerness, or the Solent, to figure in the huge pageant of steel and steam, electricity, and man-power that would be called the King's Review.

What a chance, supposing *Der Tag* were come already, for the delivery of a consignment of bombs! It warmed like a draught of wine, to think of the devastating effect of a couple of such German love-gifts, exploded in the bowels of one of those steel monsters, packed with complex machinery, high explosives, and inflammable oil. True, there might be a reverse to the medal, damping even to the spirits of a Superman. Wireless signals would go forth at the order of one amongst a little knot of dark figures on the forebridge of the Flagship, warning each of those grey monsters of its danger. Not an armoured cruiser scouting for them on the horizon, not one of all the torpedo-boat destroyers in their

vicinity, not a submarine nosing in the thick cold darkness below the restless white crests, but would join in the man-hunt that must ensue.

How the dusk would spring alive with the eyes of foes, and long rays of searchlight would go probing, and the mobile noses of guns great and lesser would be thrust from their hoods of proof-armour, sniffing bloodthirstily for the enemy up in the sky. While from the Flagship's mothering side, a Navy seaplane, armed with a Vickers' machine-gun, might swing out and plop upon the water, rise from the white snarl of waves with a vicious scream of her propeller, and, keen as a gull-hunting sea-hawk, launch herself in chase.

*Pfui!* The thought made one sick at the stomach. Cold, isolation, and darkness tried a man, no matter how courageous. Buffeted by the bitter wind, aching and stiff with weariness, lonely with the loneliness of some small bird of the migratory order, outstripped by its companions on the wild journey over the North Sea, the Kaiser's messenger drew energy and cheer from the conviction that the dispatches entrusted to him by Imperial favour were such as would hasten the arrival of The Day.

The Day, to which all good German officers devoted the second toast on Mess nights. When the Black Eagle would swoop, and the nodding witch-hag Britannia would awaken from her whisky-dreams of World-Dominion to find her armour obsolete, her sword rusted in its scabbard, the trident of Sea Power stolen from her hand.

Hurrah! for The Day when the programme arranged by the All Highest War Lord and his War Chiefs should be carried out in the complete overthrow of British Supremacy, the seizure and domination of British territory, the solution of the Great German Race Problem, in the transformation of the United Kingdom into a German dependency,—the annexation of India and the British Colonies—and the forcible Teutonisation of the hated race.

Aha! Much to be locked in an Imperial messenger's letter-bag, thought von Herrnung, greedily. What in the way of guerdon might not be lavished by a gratified All Highest upon the danger-braving and to-duty-fearlessly-devoted Flying Officer who should accomplish the Secret Mission, and lay the brown satchel at the Imperial feet.

Probably the Second—tchah!—the First Class of the Iron Cross—with military promotion, and a handsome sum in hard cash. Laudatory articles in the State-inspired Press organs and Service Gazettes presently. Meanwhile, was it fitting that the future of von Herrnung should lie, not upon the knees of the gods, but on the lap of a little, seasick English boy?

True, the brown satchel was firmly strapped to the boy, now lying in an attitude of complete exhaustion, with one arm thrown over the gunwale, and his small round head feebly nodding to and fro. The child knew nothing of the Imperial dispatches. And yet—one would have been wiser to keep the bag about one, in spite of the danger of fouling the controls.

It will be gathered that a chilly premonition of imminent disaster crawled in the veins of the Kaiser's messenger. Hunger and fatigue were spurring von Herrnung to imaginativeness unworthy of a Superman.

Now he knew his frail winged craft beset by cunning, treacherous enemies; the invisible air that cradled and supported her, only waiting to destroy. Other elemental forces, Gale, Lightning, Hail, Waterspout—in collusion to bring about her swift and speedy ruin. The Sea, no less than these, was an implacable adversary, reaching up innumerable greedy hands to drag her down and drown. The hawk-hoverer would have been a help at this juncture if one had had some previous experience in the use of it. As things were, it was wiser to leave the Englishman's invention alone. A labouring beat admonished the man's quick ear of impending engine-trouble. Ah, if the motor,

that was the living heart in the aëroplane, should break down at this juncture, or the human intelligence perched behind the roaring tractor falter, the game was up. *Kaput* for von Herrnung, he very well knew.

As though the very fear had brought on the catastrophe, the revolutions dropped. Below 1000, said the indicator's trembling finger, and there was a miss. The bang!—bang! of a back-fire followed. If one had believed in God, now, this would have been the time to pray to Him.

But now the aviator's keen eye, peering downwards through Sherbrand's binoculars, picked up something that had emerged with a sudden yeasty swirl among the white-crested waves. No handsomer nor bigger than an undersized steam-trawler, the casual observer might as such have accepted her. But a moment more, and fore and aft of the stocky little pseudo-steamer, stretched the long snaky, whitey-brown hull of a submarine.

U-18, on observation-service off Spurn Head, or a Britisher? An Evans signalling-pistol, loaded, and with a supply of spare rockets, was fixed in a cleat beside the instrument-board, within reach of the pilot's hand. The altimeter, illuminated by the electric bulb, gave an altitude of six hundred, as von Herrnung snatched the pistol, and fired, aiming towards the sky.

The shot was followed by a second detonation, and a brilliant crimson light illuminated the grey welter, throwing up orange balls of fire as it ascended, to burst in showers of incandescent sparks. Switching off, von Herrnung strained both ears and eyes for an answer to his signal. With the cessation of the motor the diapason of the North Sea rolled upwards through the twilight with a threatening of storm. As the weather-cone had presaged, a gale was coming. It blew strongly from the north-west. The engine back-fired again, and von Herrnung swore at it, trying to make out the nationality of the submarine running on the surface six hundred feet below. There were half-a-dozen tallish figures

on the narrow man-railed catwalk running along her hull forward, and one upon the screened-in platform of her humpy conning-tower.

Then the blue-white ray of a searchlight leaped forth illuminating her bows and forward torpedo-tubes—revealing the long neutral-coloured hull with the Wireless mast raised for use and soapy seas hissing off the armour-plate. A backwash of brilliance picked out the black-white-and-red Jack of Germany, fluttering from a short pole-mast sternwards. Signal-lights of white and two colours broke out upon another slender mast aft of her conning-tower, and winked and jabbered. U-18 was in touch with her man.

It was quite time, for the Bird's engine hiccupped more and more disastrously, and her pilot's frozen hands could only guess the steering-wheel. He grunted relief. *Sapperlot!* One's star had not deserted one. Once more the Prussian Field-Flying Service would, with reason, quote von Herrnung's hellish good-luck.

Meanwhile the submarine's three lights chattered volubly in German Navy Code. Do Not Attempt Make Harbour. Heavy Weather Coming. Original Orders Cancelled. Heave To. Will Stand By To Take You Aboard. To which von Herrnung, keeping pace with U-18, replied with long and short flashes of an electric signalling-torch. Understood! What Is the Sea Like? Keep Off and On. Am Coming Down!

And he came forthwith. The Commander of U-18, standing on the little platform over which furious seas were slashing, watched him critically through a pair of Zeiss binoculars. You, too, are asked to see him; pulling round the Bird's head into the teeth of the nor'wester; shutting off her hiccupping engine, implacably thrusting her nose seawards, and diving with a splendid swoop into the widening paths of spirals that ended amidst the angry surges below.

Hitting the North Sea with so shattering a slap that the Bird's landing-carriage crumpled and buckled, and the

frail spars of her wings crunched like the bones of a small bird in the jaws of a hungry cat.

A fierce green sea leaped, towered, and broke, dumping a ton of water on von Herrnung, and knocking the breath out of the man. He tore open the safety-belt as consciousness left him, and recovered in the warm benzine-flavoured stuffiness of the officer's cabin aboard the U-18, to the stinging of schnapps in his mouth and gullet, and the cheer of German words in his ear.

"Hey now, hey now, we are coming about. That is well! Drink another draught, comrade! You have had a hellishly narrow squeak. Another time, when flying oversea with dispatches, start early, pick your weather, and ship a life-belt, if you are wise!"

Thus Lieutenant Commander Luttha of Undersea-boat No. 18. You see him as a spare, weather-bitten, black-bearded officer in a full panoply of yellow oilies, and a sou'-wester shading little eyes, sharp as lancet-points and now twinkling with his bit of fun.

But the word "dispatches," coupled with the jest about the life-belt, volted through von Herrnung like the discharge from an electric battery. He gulped and choked, collecting enough tinned air to talk with, and at last got out:

"The boy—the boy, with the satchel! Where is he, in the devil's name?"

Thus adjured the Commander answered pithily:

"If you mean the half-drowned little English rat Petty Officer Stoll found washing about in the bows of your aviatik, he's alive. Don't worry about that!"

Through the churning foam upon his lips, von Herrnung spluttered furiously:

"*Himmelkreüzbombenelement!* What is the *verdammt* boy to me? It is the satchel that was strapped about the boy's middle I am asking for—the Emperor's—*Herr Gott!* —I shall go mad!"

He staggered to his feet, hitting his head a stunning crack

against the low white painted overdeck. The incautious reference to the Emperor electrified those who heard, squatting on the little folding bunks, or kneeling on the palpitating deck of the little officer's cabin, into desperate activity. Von Herrnung found himself boosted up a ladder and through a manhole, guided along a narrow slippery catwalk, washed by the surges of the North Sea, to where a collapsible boat was being emptied of a lot of shipped salt water, and the battered wreck of the Bird of War, lashed to the U-18's forward man-rail, was waiting the Commander's order to be finally abandoned to her fate.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### NUMBER EIGHTEEN

They launched the collapsible, and ransacked every cranny of the Bird's waterlogged fuselage. Not the ghost of a brown leather satchel rewarded their feverish search. In the forward cockpit the belt swung loose, the patent fastening had been opened by pulling the pin out. Clearly the boy had released himself when the Bird hit the sea.

"Let us go look at this boy!" suggested the Commander, on receiving the news that the *Kind* had breathed, and vomited sea-water. Luttha promptly led the way to the men's cabin, where Petty Officer Stoll and an earringed first-class seaman were working over a little limp naked body, outspread on the jiggetting deck-plates, in the raucous glare of the electric light.

Bawne was questioned, but nothing could be got out of him just then, except North Sea, so they wrapped him in a blue Navy blanket, and left him in charge of Petty Officer Stoll.

"This is hellishly unfortunate, you must know, Count," said the Commander, alone with von Herrnung in the vibrating steel box over the upper accumulators, called the officers' cabin, and separated from the men's quarters by a paper-thin sliding bulkhead of painted steel. You are asked to consider it furnished with seven narrow folding bunks, a trestle-table about as wide and long as a coffin-lid, some folding chairs, a marvellous array of charts on spring-rollers, fixed against the steel walls, a row of wooden lockers, a chronometer and auxiliary gyro-compass, several cylinders of oxylithe for respiratory emergencies, an electric stove of small size, a log-book and writing materials, a shelf

of German literature, chiefly nautical reference-books; sets of dominoes, a violin and a cornet, speaking-tubes and a telephone, a gramophone and a giant cuspidor.

Von Herrnung, having swapped his water-logged flying-kit and soaked underclothes for dry flannels lent by the Second-in-Command, topped off with a pair of the Commander's spare trousers, and a guernsey frock belonging to the biggest man on board. You can see him supplementing the shortness of the trousers with a pair of long sea-boots: thrusting his huge arms into the guernsey, beginning already to be superior to his rescuers upon the strength of his family rank and wealth and his flying-record, his bulk and handsomeness, and his magpie pearl. He was of the Prussian top-dog breed and let others know it, even whilst smarting under his loss. That he felt it was shown by the livid pallor testifying to mental disquiet and physical exhaustion. But he judged it wisest to bluff, and did.

"The cursed machine would have drowned me if you had not arrived in the nick of time," he said suggestively, smiling under the red moustache that hung uncurled over his full sensual lips: "Suppose you say you found me swimming in the water—the aëroplane having foundered—it is merely rewording a report!"

"So many thanks!" . . . returned the Commander, chewing hard at an unlighted cigar, sending a jet of saliva into the cuspidor, and smiling in a wry and dubious fashion. "But when I said things were hellishly unfortunate, I meant unfortunate for you!"

He moved to the green baize-covered plank that served as a cabin table, and took from a weighted document-file a pencilled paper-slip.

"As far as they concern you I will read you them as taken down by our Wireless operator. 'To Undersea-boat No. 18, on observation-duty off Spurn Head. Stand by to get in touch with, act pilot, and render aid if necessary to German Imperial Secret Service Messenger, crossing to Nordeich in

British aëroplane.' The message comes from the German Embassy in London and the sender is Grand Admiral Prinz Heinrich. I have carried out my instructions to the letter. There is only *one* man going to be broken over this affair!"

Von Herrnung knew who the man was. The Commander chewed some more of his cigar, picked his oozing yellow oil-skins off the deck, thrust himself into them, crowned himself with his sou'wester, and said, taking a farewell shot at the cuspidor:

"And to brew more thunder-beer for you is not my desire! I am sorry for you, *bei Gott!* But to make game of those who command me is not the purpose for which I am commissioned, Herr Count. Nor have I any experience in doctoring reports. I rate only as Lieutenant in the Imperial German Navy—a man born of plain people—without fortune or even *von* before my family name!"

Von Herrnung sensed that he had bitterly offended the only human being who could help him. He apologised subserviently, and catching at the straw afforded him by the Commander's admission of poverty, offered him the pickings of the wrecked aëroplane.

"For her instruments and signalling outfit—the seats and vacuum flasks even—are well worth the having, and her engine and tractor will sell for——" he named the sum in marks. "There is a patent stabiliser under her belly that I reserve for Majesty—the French have bought it or think they have!"

The speaker rubbed his hands. The hoverer might yet prove a sop for the All Highest. Imperial displeasure thus averted, all would go well. He added, feeling that he might actually afford the luxury of grumbling:

"As for me, I am what the English call 'fed up' with special missions. Conceive it. I am at a Hendon Flying School,—chatting with a handsome Englishwoman who has taken me for her lover—as I am waiting to get an inkling of the sort of invention the French War Ministry think worth

buying for use in their Service Aëronautique. I am summoned by a groom of our Embassy to speak to some Excellencies—I follow and find myself clicking my heels before Prinz Heinrich, von Moltke, and Krupp von Bohlen in an Embassy auto-car—to be sent off at a moment's notice in a little cranky devil of an English monoplane—with secret dispatches for the All Highest—on a journey over the North Sea. With the barometer falling and the hour past five meridian. That's my luck!" The speaker paused for breath.

Luttha said, pulling his black beard through his fingers with a crisp sound, a trick of his when in meditation:

"There was no time to lose. And you have a wonderful record for long-distance flying. And luck it was!—if you had been of my mind. Tell me, did not *they* give you plain instructions?"

"Do 'they' ever speak plainly?" von Herrnung scoffed; and Luttha answered calmly:

"Yes, to an ordinary man, who does not understand obscure language, they would have said: 'Lieutenant Commander Luttha, here is a brown leather satchel, with something inside it belonging to the Emperor. You will convey the satchel to Nordeich and deliver it to His Majesty's hands. And from the moment I entrust it to yours, it shall be close as your very skin to you. If you meet Death upon your errand, die with it next your heart!'"

The speaker added with a wounding accent of irony:

"Perhaps that marks the difference between a plebeian and a nobleman! *I* would have lashed it to my body, under my clothing. You strapped it about the boy! By the way, what is the boy?"

"The boy! . . . Nothing! . . . A piece of ballast, merely!"

Von Herrnung, warmed by dry clothes and exhibitions of schnapps, was fast recovering his characteristic arrogance. He added, with a shrug and a wave of the hand:

"As for the lost satchel, it may well be that duplicates of the dispatches contained in it have been sent to the Emperor by another messenger. That is the usual method, perhaps you are not aware?"

"Duplicates exist, but in only one place on earth will you find them, and that place is the London War Office!"

The Commander pitched his cigar-butt into the cuspidor, snapped the three stud-clips that secured his yellow oilskin storm-coat, and dug his piercing little eyes into von Herrnung's as he asked:

"Have you never heard of the War-engine of Robert Foulis, the Scottish sea-captain who first suggested to the British the use of steam as applied to battle-ships, and invented the screw-propeller and the big devil knows how many other things besides the mysterious, secret weapon that Great Britain has kept hidden up her sleeve a hundred and twenty-six years! It was offered by Foulis, then Earl of Clanronald, in 1812, to the British Government, and it frightened people like the drunken Regent and the Duke of York and Lord Mulgrave into refusing it. It was offered again to their War Office at the time of their Crimean War, —taken into consideration by the Duke of Newcastle and again ejected,—because—*Grosse Gott!*—it was too inhuman! As though a weapon that could end a War in a twinkling by sheer deadly effectiveness could be anything but a boon to mankind *Pfui!* Such hypocrisy makes me vomit worse than thirty hours of submergence. Not because of its inhumanity has Britain stored up the old man's war-engine. Out of diplomacy, to brutalise the great Germanic nation into subservience under the rod of Fear!"

Luttha and von Herrnung, otherwise antagonistic, were alike in their rabid hatred of Great Britain. Luttha had talked himself plum-coloured and hoarse by now, but he went on, pounding the air with a knotty, clenched fist:

"Thus it was well done on the part of the Kaiser's secret agents to steal Clanronald's War Plan, on the brink of The

Day to which we have drunk so long! Not the duplicates buried in the Whitehall strong-vaults, see you!—but the originals from the muniment-room of the Welsh castle, the country-seat of the present Earl. Less than an hour after you took flight from Hendon, London was alive and buzzing with the tale! . . . How do I know? . . . Does not a man know everything with Wireless? And you, with no inkling that you carried for Germany—Victory in the World-War that is coming—you who have lost Clanronald's secret, are a ruined man, *bei Gott!*"

He added, as von Herrnung broke out cursing and raving:

"As I have said, I pity you!—though you have tried to bribe me!—but it will not do to talk of suicide, for I shall prevent that! Your cartridges are wetted—your revolver will not serve you. And you will not get a chance to drown yourself, for I am going to submerge. My fellows have got the flying-motor out of the stirrups and stowed it away, with the auto-hoverer and the other things for the Emperor, whose property they are! Then we run, only periscopes showing, for the Gat of Norderney. There is a clear-dredged channel to Nordeich Harbour, navigable in any tide. You have to account there to the All Highest for the satchel, or I, *bei Gott!* must account to him for it and you!"

And Luttha slid back the steel door, passed through the narrow gangway and shot up the narrow steel ladder to attend to affairs on deck. Two of his subordinates instantly replaced him. On no account was von Herrnung, the living proof of the Commander's fidelity to his instructions, to be left alone, you understand.

One would have said the Superman believed in God, he blasphemed Him so industriously. When he was quite spent and voiceless, the lieutenants offered him practical sympathy in the shape of gingerbread and lager beer. He accepted the beer, and sat on one of the sofas drinking it and brooding lividly, while Undersea-boat No. 18, with

hermetically-sealed hatches, folded down her signal and Wireless masts, shut off her 2000 h.p. Diesel oil engines, sucked water into her ballast-tanks, and with only her periscopes showing above the surface, ran under her electric-motor power for Norderney Gat and Nordeich quay.

Behind her as she sped, a red stain upon the angry waters gave back the last rays of stormy sunset, smouldering out behind bars of drift-wrack, beyond the bleak east-country beaches and the long blue-black, desolate worlds.

Von Herrnung's private, personal sun was setting somewhat after the same fashion, amidst sable clouds of Imperial wrath. It was to sink below the horizon in deepest disfavour, rise again in The Day's gory dawning, and fall, its evil fires quenched in a drenching rain of blood.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### HUE AND CRY

EVEN as petrol and air mingled in the Bird's cylinders, and Davis rotated the tractor and nimbly leaped out of the way of sudden death, the buff broadsheets of the *Evening Wire* edged the kerbs of Fleet Street and ran up Kingsway to High Holborn. And from Ludgate Hill to Charing Cross, Pall Mall, and Piccadilly Circus, the raucous voices of newsboys yelled through a pelting hail of pence:

AMAZING THEFT OF A FAMILY SECRET.

STOLEN FROM GWYLL CASTLE

THE CLANRONALD WAR-PLAN.

AN ECHO OF CRIMEAN DAYS.

THIEF KNOWN. POLICE SANGUINE.

"COMMON CRACKSMAN'S ENTERPRISE OR DIPLOMATIC STROKE?"

Strings of news-carts laden with bundles of papers were rattling east, north, south, and west. Trains were taking in the story by bales of thousands and disgorging it at every stoppage, as Von Herrnung opened the throttle, and the Bird raced a hundred yards or so, bumping like a taxi going over a bad road, then rose into the air, as gracefully as a mallard, and launched upon the first wide spirals of the aërial ascent.

The small audience interested in the aëroplane, her freight, and her behaviour, watched her as she dwindled in the sight and died upon the ear. The spectators in the enclosure had

departed in dribbles, the last three-seater air-bus had rounded the aërodrome, landed and deposited the last passengers. Two or three over-enthusiastic students lingered, but the rest had shed their grimy overalls and betaken themselves home.

The mellow light of late afternoon lay sweetly on the wide expanse of treeless greensward and on the woods that tufted the horizon-line. Rooks and starlings were wheeling over distant tree-clumps, the bands no longer brayed or tootled, the mechanics were leaving the sheds and hangars, the waitresses were hastening to other employments, such as programme-vending at suburban music-halls and picture-theatres, the selling of stale *boutonnières* about the entrances of restaurants, the serving of drinks and suppers at night-clubs and so on.

On the verge of the white-marked oval from which the Bird had taken her departure, Saxham was standing with Patrine. Their faces were lifted to the sky as they talked together, and Sherbrand's eyes were irresistibly drawn to them, so heroic in mould, and so curiously alike.

There was a puzzled line between the Instructor's thick, fair eyebrows. He was ready to swear it was the same girl. But the face that had looked into his that night in Paris was somehow softer, younger. . . . It was not only the alteration in the colour of the hair. . . . If you had taken the big, hearty, smiling young woman of the Milles Plaisirs, and dipped her into a vat of hydrogen peroxide, so that not only her hair but her whole body had been bleached, you would not have accomplished such a transformation—unless the chemical had possessed the power to change the colour of her mind and soul.

The girl of the Milles Plaisirs had looked at you frankly, and spoken to you like a pal. In that atmosphere of sexual excitement, amongst those crowds of men and women, flushed with meat and wine and the desire of sensual plea-

sure, she had appealed to Sherbrand like a heather-scented breeze from the North.

Beautiful and big and sisterly, she had seemed to him who had no sisters. He had often wondered how she came to be in that place. But it had never occurred to him to lump her with the ordinary pleasure-seeker. He had read—more correctly than von Herrnung, who believed her from the first to have bitten deep into the Fruit of Knowledge—Purity if not ignorance, in her wide curving smile, and honesty in her clear unshadowed eyes.

What eyes they were, long, brilliant, blackly-lashed, browny-green as agate. What a wonderful voice came out of the depths of her splendid chest. The arch of her breastbone reminded you of a violoncello. How splendidly her head was set upon its column of warm, living ivory! Her firm round chin had a dint in it that the old Greek sculptor had failed to bestow upon the glorious Venus de Melos, the Lady of the Isle of Music. Everything about her was planned on the scale of magnificence. Six feet tall, she walked the earth like a goddess, or as women must have walked when the Sons of Light mated with the daughters of men.

Thus Sherbrand, meditating on his Fate to be, while Destiny limped towards him in the person of an undersized telegraph-clerk whose complexion, previously pallid, had deteriorated to dirty green. He began, extending a shaky hand, from which dangled a slip of limp paper:

"For you, sir. Rumball 'adn't got a picklock among his tools, so 'e burst in the door with a No. 10 spanner. They rung us up about twenty times while he was at the job. And the message is important, sir!"

"I'll see! Thank you, Burgin!"

Sherbrand took the telegram from the jerky hand and read:

"*Your — German — acquaintance — suspected — agent — robbery — documents — national — importance. At — all— costs — keep — him — until — I — come.*"

The Chief's name at the end was the nail that clinched the thing. But the cry of Macrombie's undersized assistant was the hammer-blow that drove the nail to the quick. His sharp eye, following the climbing aëroplane, had seen her flatten and swing about and leap forwards, exactly as the carrier-pigeon strikes out its line of flight for home.

"My Gawd," he yelped out. "See there! Blimy, if the —'s not done us! Bunked it by air to Kaiserland while I was spellin' out the screed. Gone with the Bird—the Bird and the 'overing gear. My Gawd! Wot's to be done?"

"Shut your head on what you know!" said Sherbrand's voice in the pale clerk's ear as Sherbrand's hand fell ungently on his shoulder. "You've done your best! It's not your fault if luck was on the other side! But—" His eyes went to the Doctor's great figure standing beside the tall white shape with the hat of twinkling silver. "But the boy!" A sickness swirled up in him and a dizziness overtopped it. He caught at and gripped the clerk's thin shoulder to keep himself upright. "My God! How shall I break it to the Doctor," Sherbrand asked himself, "if that German fellow has carried off the boy?"

"Steady-O! Ketch on to me, sir. . . . Nobody's looking!" said the telegraph clerk. He was a hero-worshipper on a robust scale and Sherbrand his chosen deity. "This ain't our young Boss givin' in, but just his empty inside playin' tricks on him," he assured himself. To Sherbrand he said humbly: "If you'd come over to the cabin there's hot cocoa and toke there. Grub'll steady you, if you'll excuse me taking the liberty of saying so—and you can't do nothing till *he* comes!"

The person to whom Burgin referred had passed the entrance-gates, almost before the sentence left the lips of the clerk. Now his alert, upright figure came in sight, briskly turning the corner of the restaurant, and wrought to the point of ironic merriment by the greatness of the blow that had fallen on him, Sherbrand shook off his dizziness

and faintness, straightened his tall body, clapped both hands to his mouth, and gave the huntsman's view-halloo:

"*Stole away! Stole—awa-aay!*"

Small cause for mirth, and yet he laughed, pointing to the dwindling speck high upon the north horizon that represented the worldly prospects of Sherbrand, and a handsome sum in cash. The Bird, just then entering a broad belt of gold-white mackerel-cloud, was lost to view in another instant. But the Chief had wheeled upon the pointing gesture, and seen, and understood.

Then he was upon them, saying in accents jarred with anger:

"How was this allowed to happen? You were warned. You had my wire?"

Sherbrand's mouth was wrung awry with another spasm of mirthless laughter. He fought it back and held out the crumpled slip of paper, saying:

"I did, but luck was on *his* side. Thanks to a relapse on Macrombie's part, I got this after the Bird had flown."

"The Bird . . ."

The blue-grey eyes and the keen hazel met, and struck a spark between them.

"'The Bird.' He has taken French leave—or, more appropriately, German—by the help of your machine?"

Sherbrand nodded, setting his teeth grimly. The wailing voice of the pallid clerk came in like a refrain:

"'Ooked it. Bunked—so 'elp me Jimmy Johnson! With our young guv'nor's mono', and the gyro 'overer!"

Said the Chief, moving sharply towards where the Wireless mast straddled over the telegraph-cabin:

"He has adopted the only means of exit by which it was possible for him to escape. All railways stations are being watched, all highways patrolled by our agents, travelling in high-powered motor-cars. We are on the look-out for him at every ocean shipping-port. One road we left open, not having the means to block it—and that is the road of the

stork and the swan! Decidedly, I might have guessed that he would play Young Lochinvar after this fashion. But until I left the ground an hour ago I did not know of the theft of the Clanronald Plan."

"The Clanronald—" Sherbrand was beginning, when the Chief cut him short.

"I had forgotten that you are as little wise as I was an hour back. Better glance at this paragraph while I make use of your O. T. installation and Wireless, and put the fear of Heaven into Macrombie, incidentally and by the way."

He thrust a tightly-folded copy of the *Evening Wire* upon Sherbrand and vanished into the rum-flavoured stuffiness of the cabin, with the pallid telegraph clerk close upon his heels. And upon Sherbrand, in the act of unfolding the newspaper, rushed his Fate, in a hat of silver spangles: challenging the knowledge in him with blazing eyes well upon the level of his own.

"Mr. Sherbrand. . . . Tell me what has happened? Why do you look so—queer and—white?"

She herself was whiter than her narrow dress, and the mouth the eager rush of words poured from was pale under its rose-tinted salve. She hurried on breathlessly:

"They show no signs of coming back—it fidgets me horribly. And—I was looking—from over there, where I was with Uncle Owen,—when you called out, 'Stole away!' and waved your arm." She glanced at the sky, shuddered and looked back at him. "Am I silly? But all the same, the General told you something! I don't ask what! But I funk—I don't know why, but it's beastly—the sensation! Tell me I've nothing to be afraid of—I swear I'll take your word!"

That she was just then a creature full of fears was written large upon her. She might have quoted Queen Constance, who I think was also a galumpher, meaning a woman of big build and sweeping gestures, and an imperious temper

withal. Sherbrand feared also, and the pang of solicitude for the pretty boy so unexpectedly dragged into the vortex of a diplomatic and political felony was, to do him credit, quite as sharp as the pang caused him by the rape of the Bird.

He answered:

"Miss Saxham, I do not believe that there is any danger of an accident. But—that there will be delay—I shall not try to disguise. The fact is——"

A guttural, Teutonic voice said close at Sherbrand's shoulder.

"*Gnädiges Fräulein* will wish to return home? It is getting late, so very late! *I haf* instructions from my master to drive the *Fräulein* back to her address."

Sherbrand wheeled, to be confronted by the thickset figure of the moustached and uniformed attendant who had occupied the seat beside the chauffeur of the big blue F.I.-A.T. car.

"Who is this?" he demanded in a look, and Patrine, her pallor drowned in a scarlet blush of horrible embarrassment, stammered:

"I really—haven't the least idea!"

"You hear!" Sherbrand's tone was not pleasant. "The lady does not know you—that ought to be enough!"

Patrine felt herself drowning in chill waves of horror. The man persisted:

"The lady is a friend of the gentleman who brought her here. . . . I haf my orders to drive the lady home in the yellow car!"

In his muddy eyes there flickered a leer or a menace. Patrine saw the Doctor coming and flew to his side. Sherbrand said, looking sternly at the German:

"You understand, your orders are nothing to the lady. She does not choose to be driven home by you!"

The man protested:

"But my master——"

Sherbrand demanded:

"Who is your master?" Then a sudden light dawned upon him, and he turned and knocked sharply at the cabin-door. At which the liveried attendant, as a man who finds hesitancy a double-edged weapon, wheeled in military fashion and retreated, casting a surly glance over his shoulder, and quickening his heavy footsteps to a jog-trot as the General's active person appeared at Sherbrand's side.

"That man, Sir Roland!" Sherbrand's slight gesture indicated the thickset figure now getting hurriedly into the yellow Darracq. He added, as the car swirled round the corner of the restaurant and vanished in the direction of the entrance-gates, "Ought I to have grabbed the brute, and hung on to him? He was certainly with a party of foreign-looking people, who interviewed von Herrnung just before he got away. You saw them?"

"I certainly saw them. And I agree with you that their unexpected appearance has had to do with their countryman's sudden departure," said the Chief. "But to grab an orderly of the German Embassy would be—only less risky than grabbing a Kaiser's messenger, on suspicion of his carrying stolen War Secrets in his official bag."

"A Kaiser's messenger!" Sherbrand's mouth shaped a soundless whistle, "Why, now I remember, he had a dispatch-case or valise with him. Wouldn't hear of leaving it behind!"

"I—daresay not," the Chief's dry smile commented.

Sherbrand went on:

"I developed muscle in persuading him to let it go in the observer's cockpit for fear of it fouling the warping-controls. No wonder he stuck to it. War Secrets!"

"It is plain you haven't glanced at the *Evening Wire*. It tells the story rather pithily, beginning with an outbreak of fire on Tuesday night at Gwyll Castle, Denbigh, caused by a short-circuit in the electric-lighting apparatus of the North Tower."

He went on:

"I waste no time telling you, for all that's possible has been done now in setting our agents on the track of the flying thief! The North Tower at Gwyll holds the priceless Clanronald library, and the Muniment Chamber, where they bottle up the original MSS. detailing the War Plan of the old Earl. The short-circuit that set up the blaze was—the kind that any amateur can arrange for with rubber gloves, a pair of pliers and a bit of soda-water wire."

"Is it known who the amateur was?"

"There is reason to suspect one Herr Rassing, an under-librarian of German nationality, who behaved like a hero, according to the local Fire Brigade! He it was, who suggested—Clanronald being absent on a yachting-cruise in the Fjords of Norway—that the contents of the Muniment Chamber should be transferred to the strong-room in the basement of the East Wing. He superintended the removal, armed with knowledge, enthusiasm, and a large-sized Webley Scott revolver, with which he volunteered to keep solitary guard till morning, outside the strong-room door!"

"And when daylight came—" hinted Sherbrand.

"It discovered the zealous Herr Rassing to be missing, and a corresponding hiatus in the treasures of the Muniment Chamber. Item, a sharkshin case inlaid with ivory figures, Japanese, antique and valuable,—containing the original diagrams—chemical *formulæ* and so on—embodying the famous Plan."

Sherbrand asked.

"Was it as tremendous as they tell one?"

The crisp voice answered:

"Tremendous it not only was, but Is. The most terrible and effective method of annihilating an enemy, that has ever been conceived by the brain of man."

Sherbrand said, drawing a deep breath:

"And that is what von Herrnung carried in the brown

leather valise-thing that he took away with my machine! Not that I trouble about the Bird. She was old, and I've got the stuff to build a new one. But my patent—the hawk-hoverer—that's another pair of shoes!"

"The hawk—! Phee-eew!"

The Chief whistled a rueful note and his keen eyes softened in sympathy:

"I had forgotten your invention. So von Herrnung has scooped for Germany the gyroscopic hovering-apparatus that the French War Ministry were proposing to buy. Now I understand the something about you that has puzzled me. You wear the look of a father, Sherbrand, bereaved of an uncommonly promising son."

Saxham's stern face rose up in Sherbrand's thought, stamped with that look, and his throat contracted chokingly. The Chief asked:

"What sort of man is the mechanic von Herrnung has commandeered? A fellow easy to bribe, or intimidate? It would be worth while to know?"

"It's a boy—not a man!" broke from Sherbrand, hurriedly and hoarsely. "General, no more unlucky thing could have happened! . . . Dr. Saxham's twelve-year-old nipper took a tremendous shine to von Herrnung, and—and—he's gone with him! That's the news the Doctor's got to hear by and by!"

There was a silence. The Chief's face was turned away. Then he said quietly:

"There was no question of 'a shine.' My Scout was obeying an order. His Chief Scout had said, 'Keep this man under observation; and if he leaves the Flying Ground—follow him, if you can!"

Sherbrand could not speak for pity of the small white face that had grinned at him out of the clumsy woollen helmet. He understood now, that when he had bent to strap the safety-belt about the little body swathed in the flannel-lined pneumatic jacket, he had felt a terrified child-heart

bumpity-bumping under his hand. And he struggled with his grief and rage in silence, broken by an utterance from the other man.

"So he followed him into the air, seeing no other course before him. My old friend Saxham has good reason to chortle over such a son. I said to-day, 'I am proud of my Scouts!' Well, to-night I am ten times prouder. I shall tell the Doctor this—when I get a private word with him—and wind up with: 'Thanks to Bawne!'"

"Then the Doctor—" Sherbrand began, a weight lifting with the hope that the news might not have to be broken:

"The Doctor knew. I had said to him, doggily: 'I'll give your pup a fighting chance to prove his Saxham breed.' It's a stark breed—hard as granite, supple as incandescent lava, —with a strain of Berserk madness, and a dash of Oriental fatalism. They can hate magnificently and forgive grandly, and love to the very verge of death."

Could *she*, Sherbrand wondered, letting his eyes travel to the tall white woman standing by the Doctor, as the Chief went over to them and grasped his old friend's hand. Then both men moved away across the dusky ground together. Those words of thanks and praise were being spoken. Coming from such a source they must be heartening to listen to. But presently when their glow had paled and faded, and the boy did not come back . . .

Presently, when the empty chair and the vacant bed, and the little garments hanging in the wardrobe should be filled and occupied and worn only by a shadow-child wrought of lovely memories. By and by, when the silence in the house should clamour in the tortured ears of the woman and the man . . .

Then, Sherbrand knew no praise of their lost darling would console Bawne's parents. . . . Dry-eyed they might smile until their lips cracked, but their hidden hearts would weep. Their tongues might be silent, but their

hearts would cry always; Did we wish our child to be heroic? Had he been a craven we would have had him now beside us! Give us our living boy again! O! keep your empty words!

A cry from Patrine prodded Sherbrand to active sympathy. So at last they had told her. She knew all. And true to her type she was raging at the Doctor and the Chief like a very termagant; upbraiding them with a spate of words rushing over her writhing lips and lioness-frenzy in her blazing eyes.

"I begged you not to let him go!" This was to the Doctor. "Faint! Do you take me for a bally idiot—to faint when there's something to be done! Follow that man and get him back! If he takes him away to Germany—don't you know we shall never see Bawne again! Oh! why —why can't I make you understand!"

The raging voice grew hoarse with sobs, though her furious eyes were dry as enamel. She added with an inflection that made Sherbrand blink and gulp:

"Don't you know—don't you *know* it will kill Aunt Lynette? And I shall be guilty—I who love them so! Oh, God, I must do something or die raving mad!"

The Doctor's great arm held her firmly round the body. Saxham was strong as an oak-tree, but who can control a woman in the frenzy of hysteria, standing six feet tall in high-heeled No. 7 shoes? She wrestled and fought, and her tawdry hat of silver spangles tumbled off, and her superb hair shed its pins of tortoiseshell, and rolled, yellow-tawny as a South African torrent in flood-time, down over her heaving shoulders, over the supple back and writhing loins, reaching nearly to her knees. Then her strength went from her, and her tears came. She dropped into a chair Sherbrand had got her, and crumpled up there, crying bitterly.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### PATRINE CONFESSES

With her hat off and her hairpins out, and her tawny-coloured mane tumbling over her heaving shoulders, the superb illusion of maturity vanished. The three men viewed Patrine with clear, unprejudiced eyes. Stripped of the magic cloak of Circe, here was no transformer of Man into the hoofed and rooting mammal, but a great galumphing schoolgirl, pouring out a heartful of trouble, without the least concern for her complexion; mopping her streaming eyes with a little sopping handkerchief; temporarily ending its brief career of usefulness with a dismal blast upon the nose.

"Take mine!" said Saxham, thrusting the large-sized square of cambric upon her.

"Th—thank you, Uncle Owen!"

She said it in the voice of a child. The torrent of tears, so different from those shed earlier, had washed her heart clean. Something hard and cynical and evil had passed out of her. She was Bawne's dear Pat again.

A lean brown hand that wore a chipped and ancient signet was next held out to her. She grasped it and was straightway hauled upon her feet.

"Are you better?" said a friendly voice, in a crisp way.

"I—think so. Thank you, Sir Roland!" She added in a tone as tear-soaked as her handkerchief, while Saxham offered her her hat, and Sherbrand tendered tortoiseshell hairpins:

"I'm awfully afraid I have behaved like a fool!"

"Like a woman!" said the friendly voice even more crisply.

"Do you think women are fools?" she was beginning, when she caught his eye and broke off. For she had met Sir Roland's mother and she knew his young wife quite well, and her Aunt Lynette, the one living being whom she worshipped, was one of his closest friends. No! To this man women were sacred. Why had she uttered such a banality? For the life of her she did not know.

She drew a sobbing breath, and looked about her vaguely, and suddenly a mist rolled away from her brain. The net of Tragedy whirled high and fell upon her, and the steel trident was driven deep between her ribs again:

"I—had forgotten!" She stared upon them. "What must you all think of me?"

Saxham's arm came round her, and Saxham's voice answered:

"Nothing, my dear, but that you are human, and have had a tremendous shock!"

She leaned against the Doctor's great shoulder, sighing:

"Thank you! . . . I'm all right now! Not going to cry any more. . . . But Bawne! If we wait long enough there will be news of him? We—shall get him back?"

She felt Saxham's iron muscles jerk, and his ribs heave as though the trident had found a home between them. Perhaps he could not find his voice, for it was the Chief who said:

"We are doing everything possible. Mr. Sherbrand is helping. He has been good enough to place the telegraph installation at our disposal and the Wireless also. A call, Burgin?"

The undersized clerk had waved a hand from the threshold of the cabin. The Chief vanished. Patrine sighed:

"Oh, if there should be news!"

"You are too sensible to be bowled over if there happens to be no news," said the Doctor's voice. But his arm was tense about her waist and she felt the beating of his heart.

"Uncle Owen!"

Sherbrand had withdrawn out of earshot. She squeezed the kind responsive hand, turned her mouth towards the Doctor's ear, and whispered tremulously:

"Uncle Owen! You don't know *him* as I do. That's why I am so—horribly afraid for Bawne! *He* would be cruel to anyone you liked, if he hated you. And he is furious with me! I have thwarted him in—something he wishes! He is bad!—dangerous!—do you understand?"

"He cannot be a bad pilot with such a record. And in such calm weather there is little danger of an accident. We must be patient; there is nothing else to do at the moment, but wait!"

Saxham had feigned to misunderstand her, for very pity, you can conceive. Blurting out her miserable secret in this moment of unselfish sorrow, his heart was wrung in him to an anguish of compassion for Patrine. But no less was he wrung by the truth her words conveyed. His son and Lynette's was in the power of an evil man! What was David's daughter saying?

"Uncle Owen!" The tall figure of Sherbrand had moved away into the reddish twilight, and a wild desire of confession spurred on the girl to desperate frankness of speech. She hurried on, nerving herself to the change that would presently show in Saxham. "Uncle Owen! I think you had better know! Since I met *him* in Paris I——"

"Stop!" said Saxham. But she would not stop. She had his blood in her, and went on, though to have set her naked foot on glowing iron would have been easier than to tell.

"I have flirted with him!—gone alone with him to restaurants and music-halls!—let him take me to the Upas!"—there was a tightness like knotted whipcord about her throat; "That's—not the worst!"

"I guessed it. Stop!" Saxham repeated:

"Who told?"—she faltered brokenly, and shivered at the deep stern whisper:

"No one told, but the reputation of the—man is known to me. His type does not hesitate where a woman's virtue is concerned."

A great sigh burst from her. "And you can speak to me and touch me kindly—you don't hate the sight of me?"

"No, my poor girl, God forbid!"

"How good!—" she began, broke off and said, shuddering: "But—Aunt Lynette! How could I bear it, if she were ever to know——"

Saxham said harshly:

"She shall not know! Who do you dream will tell her? Not I! So set your mind at rest, my girl. You are a girl—though you talk like a woman of thirty!"

She said with a miserable catch in her throat:

"Nineteen *is* rather young, isn't it? Perhaps things would have been different if only Dada had lived!"

The utterance was as inapposite as it was sentimental. If David had still been in existence his daughter would have had no less cause for regret. But Saxham, inwardly quivering and wrung with pity, could only acquiesce:

"Perhaps things would! What you have got to do now is—Forget! Do you hear me? I order you, and I will be obeyed! And I will have you leave this titled lady who employs you, and who is all kindness and no discretion. Resign your post to-morrow! You need not return to your mother. My house is your home!" He went on in his rare tone of tenderness, "You need no telling that I care for you as a daughter. Come to me, and to Lynette who loves you dearly. She will want comfort—now that—" His voice broke and his mouth twisted. He fought with his anguish, in silence, turning his grim white face away.

"Who will tell Aunt Lynette? Oh! who will tell her?" he heard Patrine whisper. He commanded himself to answer:

"For the present, I have telephoned her that we may be detained here until late. Suppose you twist up your hair now, and put your hat on. Sherbrand!"

A sweet, manly voice answered out of the dimness of the Flying Ground: "Here, Doctor! You called me?"

In the madder and umber light of the dying sunset Sherbrand's tall brown shape came towards them. Saxham said as Patrine swept her tawny tresses into one rough rope:

"I am going to ask you to find out whether the people at the refreshment-place could give my niece something by way of substitute for dinner. A cup of coffee, or cocoa with milk, a roll and butter, and a slice of cold beef or ham?"

Sherbrand said eagerly:

"I am sure Miss Saxham can get anything like that. Mrs. Durrant keeps open house till nine o'clock, or later, if there is reason. She caters for the School Staff, respectably, by contract. I lodge—a very decent berth—over the dining-room, where I have my grub. Noisy by day but quiet enough at night-time. Will you come this way, Miss Saxham? You too, Doctor?"

Saxham declined. They left him standing there, in the wide expanse that was filling up with brooding shadows, with his back to the dying rose of the sunset, looking fixedly to the north.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### THE REBOUND

PATRINE, that magnificent animal, had passed unknowingly through the painful ordeal which accompanies in the human the evolution of a soul. No doubt she had had one before without suspecting it. Now she was conscious of the presence of the guest.

Through the big barbaric halls of her nature, glittering with tinsel over plaster backed with canvas, thronged with vanities, appetites, desires, and ambitions, jostling at the glittering fountains, buying at the tawdry counters, flocking to the dubious restaurants, swooping down the water-chutes, wandering through the painted landscapes, drinking in the dubious atmosphere, had passed a ray of light, pure, vivifying and cleansing, had blown a breeze of crystal mountain air. And through the blare of brass a note had sounded that would never cease to vibrate in Patrine's ears. Having partially confessed, she experienced a disproportionate rebound of spirits. Her fears for Bawne weighed on her less heavily, Saxham's reference to cold ham had awakened in her the pangs of healthy appetite. The proximity of Sherbrand was a vividly keen pleasure. She had always wished for a brother, and here was the very *beau ideal* of one! She meant to ask him if he had sisters—she was sure they would be awfully nice girls!

One or two electric lights were switched on in the big room full of little white-covered tables, with the counter at the far end piled high with thick white plates. The big nickel urns were cold and empty, but Mrs. Durrant, the stout and smiling proprietress of the restaurant, produced hot coffee

and milk in a twinkling, bread and butter, the cold ham, and a cold pigeon-pie.

With her own very fat, very pink hands Mrs. Durrant ministered, voluble the while in sympathy. . . . The lady had been upset because the dear little boy hadn't come back. People were sometimes kept for hours through a Loose Nut, or a Slack Wire, or a Carburotter, or some little thing or another going wrong.

"You remember when Under-Instructor Davis took Mr. Durrant for an Air Beano all the way to Upavon, Mr. Sherbrand? Flares burning 'alfway through the night, and pore me!—new to the Flying then—wasn't I, Mr. Sherbrand?—going from one fit of astericks into another, and running out to meet Durrant, when he dropped down calmly 'Ome at four in the mornin', with my hair all untidy and hangin' about me—" Patrine swiftly put up a hand to assure herself that her own tawny coils were securely fastened—"for all the world like an Indian Squawk."

"Wives had their feelings, it was only to be expected," said Mrs. Durrant. Mothers had also theirs, and, that was natural too! Patrine found the idea of her own maternal relationship to Bawne so firmly fixed in the mind of Mrs. Durrant, it was barely worth the trouble to endeavour to explain it away. Mrs. Durrant had none of her own, worse luck! but here, just coming with the salad and some fried potatoes, was Mr. Durrant's married niece, Ellen Agnes, and nobody knew better what it was to lose a darling child.

Ellen Agnes, wan-eyed, anæmic, slipshod, and overworked, supported the statement. Only in April it 'ad 'appened, and Ellen Agnes 'ad never 'eld 'er 'ead up properly since. And little Elbert the 'ealthiest of children. Rising three and never a nillness till the pewmonia carried 'im orf. 'Ad only 'ad 'im phortographed three days before it 'appened! with 'is lovely little limbs and body naked, sitting on a fur rug, the blessed dear!

Ellen Agnes not appearing to recognise any connecting

link between the nude pose and the pneumonia, Patrine suppressed the obvious suggestion. Both women meant well, but their talkative sympathy oppressed her. She imagined how, when Sherbrand ate alone, the stout aunt and the thin niece would hover round his table, assailing his ears with their Cockney voices, making their common, vulgar comments on the happenings of the day.

Perhaps her disrelish showed, for the kind women presently slackened their attentions. There was nothing then to divert Sherbrand's attention from his guest, beyond the undeniable attractions of the hastily spread board.

So they ate the pie, all of it. Patrine cried, in frank astonishment at the evaporation of her second plateful:

"But I am a wolf or something. No! Not even salad. What must you think of me? Crying my eyes out one minute and stodging pigeon-pie the next! Do the rest of the friends you feed here behave as badly as that?"

Sherbrand returned, ignoring the mention of other guests:

"Now, what should I think? Nothing but that you wanted something to buck you, and I was pretty ravenous myself. It was pretty parky up there at 10,000." He answered to her question how high that was: Why, comparatively, you might imagine it about nine times as high as the top of St. Paul's Cross from the level of the ground."

Little the speaker dreamed then of aërial battles to be fought at 20,000. She asked whether he had "felt giddy" and he shook his head, saying:

"If I had felt inclined to giddiness I should have put off climbing until I felt fitter. I sympathise with Opera Stars who disappoint full houses, because some high C or lower G is a hairsbreadth off the bull. The singer can't afford a false note. It's death to a reputation. And the Flying Man can't risk brain-swim, because it means possibly nose-dive and smash. So I stay out of my sky unless I'm sure of myself. There's nothing on earth like being sure."

He had a way of saying "my sky" that was queer and

rather beautiful. Just as though he had been a lark, occurred to Patrine. And indeed, in the beaky, jutting nose, and the full, bright eyes set forward and flush with the wide orbital arches, there was some resemblance between the man and the bird.

Patrine sunned herself in the lighter moment. She who had lain through the night sleepless—had risen still a bond-slave—realized that her fetters were broken now that her evil genius had flown. Taking with him her beloved, she fully believed in malice. Piercing though that knowledge was, it could not mar the blissful sense of freedom, mental and physical.

Bawne would be brought back. Meanwhile, one's blood sang through one's being, mere living was riotous ecstasy, mere breathing sheerest delight. The joy of life radiated from her. And to Sherbrand, sitting opposite at the little coarse-clothed table, she grew momentarily more and more like the girl of the Milles Plaisirs.

True, instead of cloudy black, her hair vied in tone with the banner of coppery flame that streams from the crater of an active volcano, or burns above some giant crucible of molten metal ready to be poured forth. Her long eyes under her wide level brows looked the colour of peat-water, in the electric light that contracted their pupils to pin-heads, and brought out against the yellow-distempered walls the creamy whiteness of her wonderful skin. When she leaned her round elbows on the table-cloth and smiled at him, it was the frank, generous smile that had warmed his heart when he stood solitary and unfriended on the rose-pink carpet near the gilt turnstile on the Upper Promenade.

He would put it to the test. He beckoned the pallid Ellen Agnes, asked for the bill, slipped his hand into a breast-pocket and drew from it a tiny white silk purse.

"Oh! You found . . ."

With an indescribable emotion, half pain, half pleasure,

she saw her missing property in the broad extended palm. He said:

"It flashed on me, even as I blackguarded Davis, that you must have paid that Commissionaire-fellow at the turnstile or he'd have been breathing vengeance at my back. So I ran back to find you and ask for an address where I might send the money. You were gone! He had got this purse in his hand. So I—bluffed the brute for all I was worth, and got him to give it me!—a stroke of luck—for I'd no money left to bribe him with! Be kind and tell me how much you gave the fellow!"

The deep dimple Sherbrand remembered showed in the full oval of one of her white cheeks. Slowly the pale rose-flush sweetened and warmed the whiteness. Her eyes were dusky stars under the barbaric wealth of beech-leaf tresses. A slow smile curved her mouth, the scarlet lips parted widely, showing two perfect rows of gleaming teeth.

"Two half-jimmies!" said the rich, mellow woman's baritone. Why did it talk such awful slang? "Half my screw for one whole week of letter-writing, running errands, doing shopping, and generally sheepdogging for my friend, Lady Beauvayse!"

"Then please take this!" This was a fat bright sovereign. "And be kind and say that I may stick to the purse?"

"If you care to—" Patrine began, dubiously.

"I care—most awfully!" He went on quickly. "Lady Beauvayse—your friend—I've seen her—if she's very pretty and tremendously American?"

She nodded.

"You've spotted her! That's Lady Beau—the dear thing! But she only talks Yankee Doodle to bounders or fogies, or people who seem to expect it from her. Her English is as good as mine."

"You don't mean it!" His keen face crinkled with laughter. She was superbly unconscious of its cause. He

went on, rather ashamed of having made fun of her: "That accounts for the Old Kent Road-*cum*-Whitechapel I've heard from the august lips of British duchesses. At cricket-matches when Eton and Harrow were playing 'Varsity."

"Does it? I think not! The duchesses weren't amusing themselves, or trying to snub swankers. They were just mothers—*real* mothers—trying to talk cricket to their boys. And the boys—the sweets!—grinning up their blessed young sleeves, and saying 'Yes'm!' and 'No'm!' How I do love boys! Don't you?" Her smile contracted with a spasm of anguish. "And I'm sitting here, gobbling and gabbling, when my darling!—" She rose taller than ever, from the little table, caught up her feather stole from a chairback near and slung it vigorously round her, straightened the tinsel hat with a side-glance at the strip of a looking-glass nailed in a frame of cheap gilt beading on the matchboarded wall at her right hand, picked up the vanity-bag and the long-sticked sunshade, and declared herself ready to go.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### A NIGHT IN JULY

She reached the door before him. He had turned to say considerately to the good woman of the restaurant:

"We shall be late. . . . Frightfully, I expect! Promise me you won't sit up!"

"Oh! but I can't promise! One never knows! Best to have people up an' ready when there might be need of 'em!" Patrine heard, as she wrenched at the handle of the green curtained glass door.

"No—no! Let me!"

His hand touched hers and she drew it away, not before a keen, sharp thrill had traversed her. "*Vile, hateful creature!*" she said to the Patrine von Herrnung knew—the other woman within her, whom she loathed. "*Is not it enough that you have done what you have done?*" Then as she passed out into the night, feeling beneath her feet the roughness of the gravel walk that led between grass-plats studded with green painted chairs and little iron tables, a strange roaring filled her ears and hellish tongues of fire licked a sky of vivid blackness. She recoiled, saying in awed and shaken tones:

"Why! What has happened? What does it mean? . . . How horrible!"

The door had shut behind them. Now the round dome of the sky showed not black, but velvety purple. Away in the south-east a fierce red moon drifted like some derelict vessel burning away to embers on a waveless midnight sea. And sheaves of dazzling blue-white flames, leaping and roaring, fenced in, or seemed to fence, a dreadful lake of

Stygian darkness, upon the surface of which figures—were they men or devils?—moved. . . .

"Don't be scared, Miss Saxham! It's nothing . . . though I ought to have warned you . . . !"

Not with intent, her heaving shoulder pressed against the breast of the man who had followed her. Perhaps the contact thrilled him, for his voice was unsteady as he went on:

"I was rather a brute to forget! . . . It's a night-flare to guide—possible home-comers! . . . Wads of tow dipped in petrol, burning in iron buckets round our landing-place."

"I ought to have guessed," she said ruefully. "Forgive me for being such an idiot!"

His answer was unexpected.

"On condition that you'll leave off saying 'Great Scott!' and things like that."

"All right! But what's the matter with the expression, anyhow?" she demanded. "Do you always get riled when women use slang?"

They had been standing within the gate that led upon the Flying Ground, still girdled by its Valkyr-ring of leaping flame. He said, holding open the gate to let her pass through:

"I use slang myself, habitually, like every other man I know. But I don't know a man who really likes to hear his wife or sweetheart copy him in that respect. For myself who have neither wife, sweetheart, nor even sister, I can only say what I feel. It is—that a beautiful woman should use beautiful language. One of the old Greek poets put the whole thing into two lines. I've forgotten the original, but the translation runs like this:

> "From the goddess the speech of Olympus,
> From the herd-maid the language of the cows."

"I'm no goddess, God knows!" said Patrine, sorrowfully and sincerely.

Then a light scorching flame seemed to envelop her whole

body. She felt Sherbrand's breath upon her cheek. . . . He said, speaking swiftly, and close to her ear:

"No, you are not a goddess, but something far better! You are a woman one could worship! You could hate magnificently and forgive greatly, and love to the very verge of death! That was said to me of the Doctor, and you are like him!"

"Don't!" she said, wincing. "You don't know me!"

He answered firmly:

"But I do know you! I knew you the moment I saw you in Paris. You're the girl I have been waiting for ever since I read Morris's 'Eredwellers'. You're The Friend! Now I've found you I shall never let you go again!"

What midsummer madness was this, prompting him to sweet audacity? His, "I shall never let you go!" had a convincing, manly ring. She quickened her steps, wading through a shallow sea of shadows, through which the warm short turf came up to meet her feet. He kept by her side, and together they moved towards the Valkyr-ring of fire, changing as they advanced into isolated pillars of towering flame outlining the huge white oval of Fanshaw's landing-place. Here and there the goblin-like shapes moved, stirring the flares with rods, feeding the blaze with something from vessels they carried. And two other figures stood in talk by the telegraph-hut, recognisable, outlined against the oblong of electric radiance framed by the doorway, as Saxham and the Chief.

"This is a bit previous, you think? Headlong—ill-considered on my part—to have spoken like this to a girl I've only met once before? You must understand—a man who follows a risky profession gets into the way of not waiting for to-morrow, because to-day may be the wind-up. Say you are not angry!" Sherbrand pleaded.

"No, you poor dear boy! But you're so awfully mistaken!" There was a rich and exquisite tenderness, it seemed to Sherbrand, in the deep, full, breathy tones.

"I'm not a bit what you think me! There is nothing worthy of worship in a woman like me," said Patrine.

He asked, as they walked side by side from patches of brilliant blue-white light into deep oases of shadow:

"May I say more? May I tell you that I've thought of you ever since that Paris night. . . . What things I've called myself—if you only knew!—for not getting your address. But I swore I'd find you somehow, and I would have! I'd know your voice among a thousand. If I were blind, and forgot other people's faces, I should always see yours painted against the dark. At night—now! when I shut my eyes . . . there it is! You are not angry?"

"No—I'm only sorry for you!" she said in her deepest, sweetest tone.

"Sorry?" There was keen anxiety in the face that was illuminated by the petrol-flare they were passing. "You're not—married—or going to be?" he asked.

"Neither!"

"Thank God!" said Sherbrand simply and sincerely. "Now I'll go on! My rank bad luck gives me a kind of right. This morning I got up solid in the conviction that you and I were meant for one another; that we should somehow be brought together; that the French Government would make it possible for me to marry you by buying my hawk-hoverer—for with only the two hundred a year my uncle left me, and the two hundred my Instructorship here brings me—how could I possibly have the nerve to ask you to be my wife? And—" He caught his breath, "And everything I'd dreamed came real. The test succeeded!—I dived down out of my sky to find You! Miracle of miracles! And not twenty minutes later—I found myself nearly, if not quite—a ruined man. For if my invention has been swiped off to Germany, France will never buy, for money—what her neighbour gets for nought!"

"I understand. My poor Flying Man, you've been plucked of some of your wing-feathers!"

"I don't care, if you'll wait for me until they grow again!"

How grim a day had been followed by this night of wonder! Woven of the shining stuff of dreams it seemed, then and for long years after, to Patrine. Their intimacy grew and ripened like a magic beanstalk in the light of the red moon and the fierce blue petrol-flares. She said with a catch in her breath—like Sherbrand's:

"You must be serious!"

"I never was more so!"

She amended:

"We must be sensible! Oh! but this has been a close-packed day!"

"Hasn't it!" Sherbrand agreed, as they moved on side by side, from islands of raw, glaring light into broad pools of lustreless darkness, their tall heads level, for Patrine carried her hat of silver spangles swinging from the top of the sunshade with the lengthy stick. "Sometimes, for weeks, the days slip by smoothly as the beads of a Rosary over a baby's finger. Then—bang-bang-bang! they explode—like a rocket fired by a signal-pistol—until things fizzle out into dulness again."

"It's true!" Her bosom rose in a sigh. "But it's possible to get awfully fed up with banging and fizzling. One can learn to long—just for a little dulness, as long as it means quiet and rest, and peace of mind."

That Patrine should voice such an aspiration was incredible even to the speaker. "*How changed I must be!*" she said to herself, as Sherbrand answered her:

"With heathery moors and towering scaurs, and galloping trout-rivers brabbling over lichened boulders—and Somebody one loves to talk to—one calls that kind of dulness a happy honeymoon!"

She thrilled as his hand, swinging freely by his hip, touched hers, lightly, enclosed, and then released it. He was no tardy lover, this Flying Man. He knew a thousand times better than von Herrnung how a girl should be courted

and wooed. For, with her heart in joyful tumult, and her usually pale cheeks warmed and rosy with shy blushes, it was a girl who walked beside Alan Sherbrand that night. I am sorry she could forget so easily the slip that had led her over the frontier line, the Rubicon that can never be recrossed. But in fact she did forget, just as a young man would have forgotten. Though she was to remember as only a woman can remember, and to suffer as only a woman can.

In the midst of the new, wonderful happiness, so strangely threaded not only for Patrine, with bitter loss and tragic possibilities, she suffered a quite intolerable twinge of memory in the sudden recollection of the boldly-scrutinising look cast upon her by the bearded man in the white Naval uniform. She did not realise that an imperious gesture of the brown hand, whose wrist had sported a massive gold watch-bracelet, had whisked von Herrnung off the scene. But she guessed that the huge red-haired Prussian, bowing at the side of the big blue F.I.A.T., had clicked his heels before a master who could break him at his will.

He had boasted. . . . They *knew!* Not only the bearded man whose look had stung so, but the close-shaven old Colossus with the tortoiseshell-mounted pince-nez on his thick heavy nose and the huge wart on his yellow cheek. And the sallow diplomat in the Homburg hat shadowing the sly glance and the moustache tucked up by a sinister smile under his drooping Oriental nose. They all knew. . . . Even the servant had worn the leer that is born of knowledge, as he said in his Teutonic gutturals:

"The lady is a friend of the gentleman who brought her here . . ."

Horrible! But she would not remember. She banished the hateful, knowing faces with a gallant effort and turned to Sherbrand, asking whether he had been an Eton, or Rugby, or Harrow boy?

For had her Flying Man borne the *cachet* of the Public School Patrine Saxham would have infinitely preferred it. That it is possible to be a snob even in the most tragic or romantic moment of one's existence, she had not realised before she discovered herself to herself in this way.

"Downside was my school," he said quite proudly. Patrine had no acquaintance with Downside. "My father would have liked me to go to Harrow; but my uncle—my mother's brother—who paid for my education!—being a Catholic, naturally preferred the place where the Faith was taught. And my mother—as naturally—shared his preference. I was happy at Downside. The Fathers were thundering good to me. I worked hard—and I played hard—and when it wasn't Swot, or cricket, or football, or fives, or boxing, it was the making of flying-sticks, just shaved laths with paper wings, at first—and then a dodge much more ambitious, a model Wright in varnished card, with a propeller worked by a rubber release. . . . My father was pleased at my being a chip of the old block in my turn for mechanics. But when I wouldn't go up for Woolwich—when I entered at Strongitharm's College of Engineering on Tyneside, and spent two years at Folsom's Works at Sunderland—he rather gave me up, I fancy, as a low-minded kind of cad."

He shook himself as though to shake off the adverse paternal judgment.

"I had my reasons for not going in for the Army, though I love it. They weren't easy to explain, and so I didn't try. But my father never liked the idea of my being a civil engineer. Even my mother, and my uncle—dear old fellow—*he* understands me better now!"

"Why?"

"Because he's dead!" said Sherbrand simply, "and the Holy Souls know everything!"

"The Holy Souls?" By the glare of the flare-light her puzzled eyes questioned him.

"The Holy Souls in Purgatory. They're privileged to help us. We help them—by praying for them. It's—a spiritual intercommunication—a kind of endless chain. A circuit of influence, received and transmitted, not by etheric flashes, but by a medium more subtle. Prayer—in a word!"

His bright-winged intellect had outstripped her heavier, duller intelligence. She suddenly felt like a caterpillar on a cabbage-leaf, slow-moving, groping, but dimly conscious of a distant affinity with the jewel-winged butterfly hovering high in golden air. . . .

"*Prayer*," she repeated dully, "do you believe in prayer?"

"Naturally!" said Sherbrand—"since I believe in God. Do not you? . . ."

"I hardly——"

In the ensuing pause Patrine had a brief retrospective vision of the curate who had prepared her for Confirmation, and who had talked of the Almighty as though He were a crotchety but benevolent old man. And last time she had been to Church—a fashionably attended High Church in the West End—another curate in a black cassock and tufted biretta had preached about the 'Par of Gard, the baptismal dar of Grace, the bar of flars,' in which our first parents dwelt in Eden, 'the fatal ar' in which they sinned, and the 'shar of tars' with which Eve lamented her fall.

"No," she said bluntly, "I don't think I believe in God at all now, though it sometimes seems as though there must be Somebody behind things!—Somebody who punishes—Somebody who laughs! As for a religion, I don't suppose I've ever had one. Oh, yes!—my religion is Aunt Lynette!"

A mental picture of Lynette, years ago in the Harley Street nursery, teaching a curly-headed baby Bawne to say his evening prayer, while a great galumphing girl stood in the doorway and looked and listened, rose up and brought with it the horrible choking sensation. She fought with it as Sherbrand said:

"I think you are speaking of Mrs. Saxham? Well, one must have a star to hitch one's waggon to. And she is a star—if ever I saw one! A woman with a face like a Donatello Madonna, or a tall lily growing in the garden-cloisters of some Italian mountain-convent, and who has the Faith,—ought to be able to teach you to believe in God! Why not ask her? I once knelt in a Church near her, and saw her praying. She seemed—very close to what Norman or someone else called the Eternal Verities."

"She will be nearer still," said Patrine with sudden, savage roughness, "if anything happens—if Bawne is killed! She will die of a broken heart!"

"Then why not pray," argued Sherbrand, "that she may get him back again? Why not try it? There's nothing else that helps so well!"

"Pray!" The tall girl stopped short and swung round on him, facing him. A moment since they had walked like lovers. Now the spell was broken—at all events, for the time.

"Pray—pray!" she mocked. "Am I a sneak?—to pray when I don't believe in prayer! And if I did believe, God—if He exists—would not hear me. Even the parsons own He has His favourites. I am not one of them. . . . I am one of His forgets!"

## XL

### MACROMBIE IS SACKED

Tall, lithe, vigorous, masterful, they confronted each other across the gulf that suddenly opened between them—the bottomless chasm that yawns between Faith and Unbelief.

In the fitful uncanny light, the darker side of Patrine started into sinister prominence. Her defiant face was masked by shadow, but the fierce vibrating voice and towering shape had something of the fallen angel. Had wide sable pinions sprung and bannered from her shoulders, Sherbrand would hardly have been surprised.

"Let us draw the line at that. If we are to be friends—and I would like us to be!—agree to it! But since you have what I have not—you would call it Faith, no doubt," he guessed the wide mouth curving in a jeering smile, "there is nothing to prevent *you* from praying for Aunt Lynette and for Bawne too! Unless you are the kind of physician who draws the line at taking his own drugs!"

If she had thought to disconcert Sherbrand she erred. He said instantly:

"I give you my word of Honour that I will pray for them! But there is one other person much dearer to me than either. You don't ask me for *her*, but all the same . . ."

"You kind, dear boy! Pray for me all you want to!"

She was his big, smiling girl of the Milles Plaisirs, and the Pat young Bawne worshipped, as she stretched out her beautiful, massive arm and offered him a cordial hand.

"Shake, Mister! Making love to me one minute and bally-ragging me the next! . . . Great Scott! Ah!—I've said it again—and I gave you my word I'd not!"

He took the hand in a close grasp, sought for the other and took it also. . . .

"Thank you! Why, how you're shivering! You have nothing but that feather thing over your thin gown! Wait half a minute—I'll get you a wrap!"

He was gone in an instant, leaving her standing on the border-line of one of the oases of black-velvet shadow, swayed by the violence of her emotion as some tall young birch might have been shaken by the fury of a south-west gale.

His touch. . . . She had not dreamed. . . . Her head drooped, and a long sigh went fluttering after him into the darkness, like some night-moth whose wings are wrought of hues more gorgeous than the peacock butterfly's, whose scent is on the alert, and whose diamond eyes pierce the blackest midnight in search of the partner of its kind.

A footstep she knew approached. A familiar voice called her:

"Uncle Owen." The spell broke. Her mind leaped up alert and quivering. "Have you any news—of Bawne?"

"I have news!"

"Not——"

"Not the worst news," said Saxham's harsh voice, "but not—hopeful!"

"They are not coming back?" She strove to set her heel on the treacherous hope that he would say No! For how could she bring herself to desire the enemy's return. And yet the thought of Bawne was a stab of anguish in her bosom. What was the Doctor saying?

"The last definite intelligence received of them confirms the certainty that Captain von Herrnung is now over the North Sea. He alighted nowhere; that we have positively learned from many different news-centres. A tractor-monoplane answering to the description and carrying two passengers passed the Bull Light on Spurn Head, at a few

minutes before eight. The lighthouse-keeper signalled that bad weather might be expected. The pilot paid no attention. And later on——"

As Saxham spoke, with that strange hoarseness, Patrine took his arm tremblingly. Her heart plunged as though it would burst its prison as the Doctor went on:

"An hour or more later a Wireless came in. It had been sent on to Sir Roland from the Admiralty!—I will not puzzle you with technical details. But at 8.30 the officer on duty on the upper-bridge of the second-in-line of a Battle Squadron steaming through Northern Waters on the way to a Southern rendezvous, reported having heard an aëroplane pass overhead, crossing the course of the Squadron diagonally—apparently flying due east——"

Saxham added:

"The aviator made no signal for assistance. But the engine-beat told of trouble developing. . . . There is nothing to do but wait and hope!"

What had really happened on board H.M.S. *Rigasamos*, maintaining her appointed speed of fifteen knots, and her statutory two-cable-lengths from the stern of the Flagship ahead, and the bows of the sister-ship following her, had been that as the ship's band struck into *The Roast Beef of Old England*, and the Owner took his place at the head of the Ward-room mess-table, his Second in Command on the fore-bridge got a speaking-tube message from the Navigating Lieutenant on the upper-bridge, to say that the drone of an aëroplane, flying at about four hundred overhead, had been picked up by Warrant Officer So-and-So, of the gun and searchlight control, *per* medium of the microphone.

The Second in Command called back through the voice-tube:

"An aëroplane. . . . You're sure? Could hear her racket myself, without assistance. But put it down to a

Fleet Seaplane taking a flip round the Squadron for exercise, or one of the Goody-Two-Shoes from the R.N.A.S. Station at Rosforth, blown out to sea doing Coast Patrol."

An answer rumbled down the pipe:

"It was an aëro all right, sir! The rattle of her floats 'ud have given away a Goody. . . . Travelling east against the side-drive of a forty-mile-an-hour north-west gale. . . . And with engine trouble well developed. Missing and back-firing like the gayest kind of hell!"

The Second in Command took his ear from the mouth of the speaking-tube, and with a glance that included the figures of his Sub-Lieutenant, the Midshipman, signalmen, and lookouts at their posts swung into the chart-house and logged the occurrence in the plain language of the sea. The clock told 8.35 P.M. as he finished, capped his fountain pen, and slipped it in an inside pocket, soliloquising:

"Travelling east against a forty-mile-an-hour gale from the north-west, and with engine-trouble to top up with . . . Little Willie will be seeing the angels pretty soon at this rate! Or piling himself up somewhere on the coast of Holland! Wonder who the bally idiot is?"

Saxham continued, and now he croaked as hoarsely as a raven:

"Sir Roland has little doubt that the aëroplane heard on the *Rigasamos* was Sherbrand's 'Bird of War.' If so, there would be very little hope left, unless it had been previously arranged that a vessel belonging to—a foreign Power!—was to watch for and give help if she should require it. Now you know as much as I do. I have telephoned to both Lady Beauvayse and your mother that you return with me to Harley Street. We shall go presently. First, I want you to speak on the telephone to Lynette."

"To—Lynette!" Patrine breathed. The Doctor told her: "I have kept the worst from Lynette hitherto. . . . I shall do so until the ultimate hope is abandoned. My

wife knows my voice so well. . . . You understand. . . . She would suspect something . . ."

His voice stumbled and broke. And clinging to the arm of the big man standing quietly beside her, potent in inertia as a lump of raw iron, Patrine realised that her anguish was a drop in the ocean of his. She took his hand and said in a tone he had never before heard from her:

"Come, dear! We will go and speak to her now."

So they went across to the telegraph-cabin, raw with unshaded electric light and littered with papers. The Chief was there, looking livid and careworn, leaning one elbow on the edge of the stand that supported the Wireless, and wearing the telephone head-band with the ear-pieces, as he dictated to the pallid clerk who occupied a Windsor chair at a stained deal desk, and wrote with a spluttering pen on a depleted paper-pad. At first sight there seemed to be nothing else in the place but a low voice speaking, a Railway Key instrument, a file for telegrams and an overpowering odour of rum.

The odour of rum consolidated to Patrine's view into a stocky thickset man with a square heavy yellow face set into a tragic mask of despair. It was Macrombie, ex-Petty Officer telegraphist, whom the Royal Navy had spat forth for being D.O.D. fifteen full years before. Sacked now from his civil employment, for the old glaring, unblinkable offence.

The liquor had barely faded out in him; his breath came across the little cabin like a flaming sword, and his eyes under their beetling coal-black eyebrows looked burnt-out. He rose from the debilitated office-stool he had been sitting on, saluted Patrine stiffly and said:

"Mem, this is no place for a leddy, wi' a drucken wastrel like mysel' in it. Ay! I hae lat ower a drap too mony, I am awa' the noo wi' my weicht o' wyte. But no wi'oot a warstle have I yielded to the Enemy!" His anguish broke

the flood-gates in a rumbling roar. "Like Job I hae cried oot in the nicht-watches to my Creator, speiring o' Him why He made weak men an' strong rum? He didna' gie me ony answer—and I am ganging down the Broad Road's fast as my bluidy thirrst can carry me—a disgraced and ruined man!"

"Mr. Sherbrand will give you another chance. I know he will!—I'll ask him!" came impetuously in the big warm womanly baritone.

"You're a grand woman to luik at, and the lad'll gie in—an' the haill deil's dance to begin ance mair. . . . Na, na, my bonny leddy!" said Macrombie, "ye can never lippen to the promises o' a drunkard. Best lat me gang my gait to muckle Hell. Ay! I'll no' be lonesome there for want o' company. . . . Toch! what a regiment o' Macrombies deid an' damned will answer 'Present' to auld Satan's roll-call! Guid-nicht, my leddy, an' thanks to ye a' the same."

He took his cap from a peg, and from the corner a bundle of miscellaneous possessions, rolled up in apparently a worn alpaca office-coat, and girt about with knotted string. He saluted the Chief and Saxham, and nodded to the telegraph clerk, and went out of the cabin in a plodding kind of hurry as though no grass should grow under his feet before he set them for good upon the dreadful downward Road.

His vice had played into an enemy's hands, and he would trust himself no longer. He meted out judgment to rum-soaked Macrombie, assuming for himself the prerogative of the One Judge. But he got his chance in spite of himself, when Britain's Hour came.

## CHAPTER XLI

### SAXHAM LIES

At Saxham's nod Patrine rang up Lynette, and the familiar voice that came back, spun out to a spider-thread of sweetness across the distance, stabbed the listener to the heart like a delicate blade of gold-wrought steel. It said, with a quiver in it:

"Of course, I am not nervous at all. And I know how much Bawne would enjoy the night-flying. But if Owen were not there, perhaps I might be—afraid that something was wrong. Owen!"

"Say that I am here," the Doctor signed, and Patrine obeyed.

"Tell my darling to speak to me," said the voice, and Patrine, dropping the microphone from suddenly useless fingers, saw Saxham take it and force his stiff white lips to speech:

"It is not possible—just at this moment. You forget——"

"Of course . . . The fireworks!"

"Just so. The fireworks. Expect us in another hour. And—Patrine is here and coming back to Harley Street. To stay. Please tell Mrs. Keyse and Janey to get a room ready."

The cordial answer came:

"I will at once. Dear Pat! how glad I shall be to have her!"

"This is Patrine speaking now!"

Saxham's steady hand touched Patrine's in transferring the receiver of the telephone, and the chill of it stung like

the touch of death. She could not control her trembling as she answered:

"You are always so kind to me, dear Aunt Lynette!"

"No, dear! In an hour, then? Take care of my precious," the sweet voice pleaded, "until I see you both . . ."

"Yes—yes!"

Saxham's hand hung up the receiver, rang off, and steadied Patrine, whose knees were melting under her weight:

"Don't ask me . . . any more . . . I—can't!" she begged of him brokenly. He said, and with those deep lines that showed in his hard grey face, and his light eyes staring haggardly from caves that grief had dug about them, Saxham looked older by twenty years:

"I know it was hard, but the thing had got to be done. How could I bludgeon her with the truth, whispered over a wire? Once face to face, the first glimpse of me will show her that I have lied to her. God help me!" said the Dop Doctor; "I told her I had stayed on here with Bawne to give him the treat of seeing a night-flying display."

"How—horribly clever of you!"

"So clever," Saxham answered harshly, "that I shall probably regret it to the end of my days. In the whole of my practice I have never known a well-meant deceit do any good—rather the opposite. Consequently, I preach to my patients Truth before everything—and break down and lie when my own turn comes—like the damned coward I am."

"We shall leave here now in a few minutes," went on the Doctor, glowering at his chronometer. "I sent Keyse away with the car upon a message. He will be here to take us home to Harley Street at half-past nine. You have ample time to telephone to Berkeley Square for your clothes and so on. . . . Lady Beauvayse's maid can pack them for you, I presume?"

"Oh, yes. She's decent in the way of doing things for me."

"Very well."

The Doctor left the telegraph-hut, and Patrine 'phoned to Berkeley Square. Then, with a sudden recollection of an appointment which must be cancelled, she gave the number that meant Margot's newly-furnished mansion, and presently heard the little bird-like voice chirping:

"Yes, this is oo, Cadogan Place. I'm Lady Norwater! . . . Is that you, Pat? Yes? What cheer? . . . I'm having a long, deadly domestic evening. Franky's reading an improving book aloud to me—at least he was when you rang up—'Matrimony for Beginners. A Handbook to Happiness,' it's called. But I don't believe the man who wrote it ever had a live wife."

"Probably not. Margot, pet, I can't possibly lunch with you to-morrow!"

"Don't say you back out because of the book! Fits has got it now under the sofa." Fits was Franky's lady bull-terrier. "And by the time she's done with it there won't be much left. Say you'll come!" Margot urged. "Franky's got to test a new car—so Rhona Helvellyn's coming with two or three Militant pals of hers. I'll give you lobster *Américaine* and cold lamb in mint aspic—and strawberry *mousse*. There!"

"I'm frightfully sorry, my dinkie, but it simply can't be!"

"What tosh! And we're going to talk over ideas for speeches at the Monster Meeting of Women in October at the Royal Hall. And Rhona has a Grand Slam in the way of surprises—did she say anything to you about the Mansion House Banquet demonstration she's thought of for Monday night?"

"Yes, and I'm down on it—like houses!" declared Patrine. "Is Rhona really spoiling for a taste of skilly and yard-exercise? Don't you get mixed up. Think of Franky

reading the paragraphs: 'POPULAR YOUNG PEERESS ON THE SUFFRAGE WAR-PATH. SOCIETY BEAUTY HECKLES THE LORD MAYOR! VISCOUNTESS NORWATER BURSTS UPON BANQUETING BISHOPS, IN THE CHARACTER OF A WOMAN WHO WANTS A VOTE!'"

Patrine called good-bye and rang off, turning with the smile upon her lips to see Sherbrand standing behind her with a long white coat upon his arm.

"I have brought you a wrap. A lady forgot it here the other day. Let me help you to put it on."

Patrine shivered as he drew the large loose garment round her. It was a white Malta blanket-coat, very soft and fleecy and warm.

"Shall we have another turn on the Grounds before the Doctor's car——" Sherbrand was beginning, when the Chief removed the Wireless head-band and came forward.

"Miss Saxham, I must detain you for a minute, I am afraid."

Sherbrand went out of the hut. At a sign the pale clerk evaporated. Sir Roland moved nearer to Patrine. How old he looked! she thought.

"You are done up! *Esquinté*, aren't you?'

"I am tired, but neither done up nor the other thing. Miss Saxham, you just now put me in possession of the details of a Suffragist plot. The friend of a friend of yours, backed by some other viragoes of the militant order, intends —I quote your own words!—to a bid for a diet of skilly, and prison-yard exercise, by interrupting the after-dinner speakers at the Mansion House Banquet on Monday night. Kindly let her know from me that the stewards will be prepared to prevent her doing so,—and tell her that women will never make successful conspirators until they learn to hold their tongues! Now, good-night. Your incautiousness has rendered Miss Helvellyn a service. She will bless it one day if she doesn't now."

He took Patrine's hand in his frank, strong clasp. The

haggard lines on the keen bronzed face did not mar the beauty of its kindliness.

"You have given her a chance. Let's hope she makes the most of it. To herd with the—wild she-asses isn't the way to serve her sex. Rowdiness and shrieking will never get the Vote for Women. Burning down empty country-houses won't land a female Member in the House of Parliament. It isn't Propaganda to—behave like an improper goose. Mind you tell her! That you, Saxham?" as a tall figure came towards them out of the glimmering darkness fitfully splashed by the petrol-flares now burnt down and dying out. Best take your niece home to Harley Street, she is thoroughly tired. Sherbrand and myself and Mr. Burgin here are good for hours yet."

## CHAPTER XLII

### SAXHAM BREAKS THE NEWS

"OWEN! . . ."

Lynette was dressed in a delicate, filmy black chiffon dinner-gown, and as Saxham's latch-key clicked in the front door-lock and she rose up out of the tall carved armchair that stood beside the large hall fireplace, her paleness seemed to diffuse light, like the whiteness of the moon.

"Owen . . . He is not . . . What . . ."

Her wide bright glance went past the tall wrapped-up figure of Patrine to the taller shape that bulked behind her. No small active boy-form danced in its wake. She put out her arms, groping blindly—swayed and would have fallen, but that Saxham strode past Patrine, caught the slender figure in his powerful embrace, turned and carried his wife away down the short corridor that led to the consulting-room.

"Miss Pat, my dear! There's cold supper all laid an' ready waitin' in the dining-room. By the Doctor's special orders, and I was to see you eat."

Thus Mrs. Keyse, now for years housekeeper at Harley Street, a little light-haired woman, common of speech and innocent of grammar, but a pearl of price in the Doctor's estimation and her mistress's right hand.

"Don't say they fed you at 'Endon on 'am and salad an' pigeon-pie. Trash is the word," said Mrs. Keyse, "for resturong pastry, and them there piegeons, if language could be given 'em, would bear me out in what I say."

But Patrine refused baked meats, submitting to be escorted to her room and tenderly fussed over by the kind, Cockney-tongued little woman, and yellow-haired pink-

cheeked thirteen-year-old Janey, out of whose small triangular face looked the honest grey eyes of W. Keyse.

Both Mrs. Keyse and Janey had been crying, for Keyse, who acted as the Doctor's chauffeur, had broken bad news in the kitchen-regions. Master Bawne, according to Keyse, had been taken for a trip in one of them Hairos by a German flying-bloke, and it was feared—not having returned or been heard of—that Something or Other had gone wrong.

Mrs. Keyse, a born optimist, rejected the idea of accident or casualty with ringing sniffs of incredulity. Master Bawne, the blessed dear! had prob'ly bin kidnup' by some foreign Nobleman wanting a Nair. Trust a German, Mrs. Keyse would never! having when a young woman in service at Alexandra Crescent, Kentish Town, N. W., been treated something frightful by a young man who travelled in shaving-sets of German silver and other fancy articles of Teuton origin. Keyse must often have heard her mention That There Green?

Keyse responded, lighting his pipe, for his wife and daughter had accompanied him to their own private parlour in the basement, looking out across the yard to the garage over which Billy and Janey had been born:

"Twice a day since you and me stood up before the dodger to git married. But you never tipped me as 'ow the bloke was a bloomin' Fritzer before. 'Ow do you make it out? Switch me on to the notion! 'Cos o' somethink in the German nickel 'e drummed in gettin' into 'im an' affectin' 'is blood?"

Mrs. Keyse, impervious to sarcasm as incapable of grammar, maintained that the subject under discussion had spoke wiv' a Naxent particularly noticeable when upset. Broker English, in moments of passion, with red eyes and white 'air simpular to one o' them Verbenas, had in conjunction with a decided bent towards bigamy, and an appetite for other people's savings, distinguished That There Green.

W. Keyse and Janey went off to bed, and the other servants, instructed through the Doctor's consulting-room speaking-pipe, shut up the house and retired, all save the night-maid who answered the telephone, and attended to the midnight rings at the hall-door. But Mrs. Keyse did not follow the household. The Doctor and Mrs. Saxham were still shut up together in the consulting-room. Mrs. Keyse owned to herself that she had talked all that rubbage about That There Green and cetra, to hide that her heart was as water in her bosom, and that she trimbled and shook all over after the fashion of them Fancy shapes of Chicken in Haspeck, or Coffin cream, or Blue Mange coloured with Scotch Anneal.

It grew late and later. The flares on the Flying Ground, many times renewed, had died down to greasy black ash in the scorched and dented buckets, before there was a movement or a sound in the dark consulting-room. Then the woman who sat in the chair sighed, and the long quivering breath she drew, stirred the thick hair of the man who knelt upon the floor before her, holding her in his arms.

"Owen!"

"My wife!"

The sigh that had escaped her seemed to flutter through the unlighted room like some dusky-winged creature of the darkness. She leaned her face upon his brow, pressing her lips upon the smooth place above the broad meeting eyebrows. The first kiss she had ever given Saxham had been placed just there. Now the sweet lips were cold. He could feel how the delicate white teeth were set behind them. Had she relaxed her grip upon herself he knew she must have cried aloud. Nor could he help her save by his sustaining hold, and the silence of a grief only equalled by her own. Thus they had remained, speechless through the hours; drawn closer than ever by the anguish of mutual loss.

Now she stirred in Saxham's arms, and spoke collectedly:

"Tell me Bawne is not—dead! Give me courage to go on waiting. And yet, do not help me to deceive myself or you, with a false hope."

"If the worst had happened," said Saxham, almost appealingly, "should we not have known it?"

She breathed between stiff lips, trying to control her shuddering:

"Twice to-night I have heard him call me: '*Mother!*' and then again, '*Mother!*' Now I feel"—she closed her eyes and opened them widely, staring through the darkness—"that he is wanting me!—wanting you!—as he never has before. We were always near till now—he could not realise what parting meant!"

She fought with sobs, and the tears she could not keep back fell in the darkness on her husband's face. His own were mingled with them. Perhaps she knew it, as she wiped them away with a touch that was a caress, saying:

"We must not give in! We must not fail him! To abandon hope too soon would be to fail!"

Courage had come to her with the paling of the stars and the greying in the East that meant the dayspring. She was full of solicitude for Saxham's weariness, as he rose up stiffly as a knight who has watched his armour through the long hours, kneeling on the threshold of the Sanctuary, and knows with the waning of the flame in the lamp before the Tabernacle that his vigil is over and done.

"You are tired—so tired! Dear Owen, go to bed now, if only for an hour or two. There will be news of him very soon now—there *must* be news!"

Saxham took a delicate fleecy wrap from a chair and put it about her, for she shivered in the raw chill of the unsunned morning air. Then he touched the blind, and it rolled up upon a vista of backyard and garage. The shriek of an engine and the vibrating passage of an early train through

Portland Road Tube Railway came into their ears, standing together at the open window, as Dawn in her streaming crocus veil peeped shyly through the vast smoke-bank that broods upon the morning face of London, engendered by the innumerable little fires of those among her five millions who must rise and eat, and go forth to labour ere yet it is fairly day.

"Owen, tell me! What is coming? What is it I feel, here and here?"

She turned upon her husband suddenly with the question, touching her brow and heart lightly and fixing on him her widely opened eyes. The haunted look of Beatrice had come back to them. His wife's strange likeness to the Guido portrait in the Barberini Palace Gallery—the tragic face with the wistful eyes, that despite the asseverations of the learned and critical will be associated as long as its canvas hangs together with the Daughter of the Cenci—leaped up in her at this hour to startle him afresh.

"What is in the air?" she asked. "What changes are taking place about us? What great and horrible Thing is moving,—moving towards us as we stand together here?"

Saxham's powerful arm went round her protectingly. He answered:

"You shall know, my love, my comrade. In confidence —I am permitted to tell you this much. We stand upon the very brink of international War!"

She looked at him and in the golden eyes he read courage, endurance and tenderness. Love that would be changeless. Fidelity through life beyond Death to the Life that is for evermore.

"You mean that Austro-Hungary will attack Servia, and that Russia will intervene?"

"As Austria intends, no doubt," said Saxham shrugging, "prompted by her Mentor and Ally at Berlin. In him we have a personality blatantly vain, immensely egoistic, feverishly energetic, imbued to the verge of monomania

with the idea of his own appointment by the Almighty—as they understand Him in Germany—to be Imperial leader of nations and arbiter of the destinies of Kings!"

He went on:

"Suppose the Great Powers of the World a row of straw bee-skeps, susceptible of being upset by a Hohenzollern kick! Will the mailed toe of Imperial Germany refrain from giving it—invading France through the lost Alsace-Lorraine provinces, the moment Austria-Hungary gets to grips with the Russian bear? Britain is France's ally, bound in Honour to support her. Now you understand what vital questions the Chancellories of the world were burning electric light and brain-power and eyesight over, the long night through, while you and I——"

She stopped him:

"You make me think!—You have told me—That man who has taken my darling is a German Flying Officer. He may have had some urgent, secret reason for quitting England at once!"

"It is more than probable that he carried dispatches of importance. But I can answer no questions on that point. I should be verging, if I did, on a betrayal of confidence."

Lynette Saxham looked at her husband earnestly, and the change wrought in her by the long night's vigil of sorrow sent a pang through the man's heart. That line of anxiety between the slender eyebrows and the bluish shadows round the golden eyes came to him, like the sorrowful sweetness of the exquisite lips, out of the past.

"Why do the Germans hate us?" she asked, and he answered wearily and sombrely:

"As the nation with which Germany runs neck and neck in military armament, national wealth and influence, Germans pay us British the compliment of dislike. German ambition, spreading rank and high, is checked in the attainment of its ends even by our geographical position. We carry in our veins too large a share of Teutonic blood, to

be ingratiating or subservient to our arrogant and domineering neighbours. What hatred is bitterer than racial hatred? Where is enmity deadlier than that one finds existing between women and men of kindred blood?"

The face of David, fair and debonair, rose up before Saxham as he said it. Strange! that even while he thanked his stars for David's ancient treachery, the fact of the betrayal should rankle in the Doctor still.

"Nowhere is there hatred more terrible. Listen, Owen—there is something I want to tell you——"

Lynette shivered and drew the fleecy shawl more closely about her white bare throat, and the slender shoulders and arms that were revealed through the laces of her filmy dinner-gown:

"In the first days of the Siege of Gueldersdorp, a woman from the native stad, the wife of a Barala herd, who came to the Convent for medicine and soup for a sick *piccanin*—told the Mother that long before the Orange Free State threw in its lot with the Transvaal—long before Oom Paul and Vader Steyn ordered that all *rooinek* soldiers sent by Groot Brittanje to South Africa should quit the country—the Barala could not sleep in their kraals at night '*for the going of the creatures.*' Not all the creatures of prey—the Eaters of Flesh—the crows and the *aasvogels*, the wild dogs and jackals, the *aard*-wolves, and hyænas. But the hartebeest and springbok and prongbuck and rietbuck; with the little gazelles and tiny antelopes, the *dassies* and hares, and all the shy, wild harmless things that are stalked and shot for what is called sport, by most men and some women—they passed away in multitudes each night until just before the dawn. Even the *meerkat* and the leopard went, the baboons and snakes and the big lizards. Barala trackers followed the trails North to the Marches of the Okavango—and farther still into the Mabunda country—the woman told us—and their wise men had warned them that it was a *teeken* of War to come."

Her wistful eyes strained towards the East, where between the crowded roofs of the vast City and the shadowy purple day-brow, showed a clear wide band of crocus-yellow, melting into exquisite hyacinth-blue.

"Perhaps I am like the antelope and the hares and the wild-bucks and the other creatures. It may be that this nameless Thing that I have felt coming nearer and nearer is War," said Lynette. Then she winced as though the net had whirled and fallen, and the trident pierced, and cried out irrepressibly: "If so—Bawne will be out there unprotected—in the midst of it! Owen!—do you hear me? How can you stand there so calmly when such a thing may be? How—oh!—how could you consent to his going?"

Saxham's square face was set like a mask in the stern effort for self-control. He was in spirit with the Navigating Lieutenant on the upper bridge of H.M.S. *Rigasamos*, hearkening to the drone of an aëroplane struggling against the thrust of a north-west gale. . . . He heard the double knock of a back-fire, and heard men talking about engine-trouble. Even as he brought himself back to say quietly:

"I did as you would have done in the same circumstances. If the same voice that spoke to me had virtually said to you: '*Here stands your only son, a child in years and yet a man for England! Will you let him go?*' Would you not have consented? If you deny, I shall tell you that I know my wife better than she knows herself!"

"'*A child in years—a man for England. . . .*'" The fold between her slender eyebrows deepened and the delicate sensitive upper-lip lifted, showing the white, slightly irregular teeth. "I do not understand," she said piteously; "Was there any question of an order to be carried out?—a duty to be done?"

"There was a question to be settled," said Saxham, "involving Bawne's whole future. Here and Hereafter—and the question was this: Whether the son you have given me is

worthy of his mother, or whether he has inherited any twist of brain, any degenerate and wretched weakness from the father whom your pure hand saved and led back, my guardian Saint, my heart's beloved!—from the very threshold of the gates of Hell."

"Owen! Don't speak so of yourself. I will not hear it. You had been so wronged—driven beside yourself by misfortune and betrayal. You were not responsible——" She covered the little ears with the slender hands. He took the hands down and kissed them, and held them in his own, as he went on:

"That is what I should like to believe. But—the truth is very different. There was—there is still, I suppose—a spot of weakness in me. A bubble of air in the casting—a flaw in the wrought steel." He looked like wrought steel as he spoke; "I had to be sure our boy is sound, mentally and morally as he is physically. Fit—in the fullest and highest sense of the word. Rather than have the doubt," said Saxham, "or the knowledge that confirms the doubt, I would——"

"No, no!" She tried to free her slender hands, but the Doctor's hold was as inexorable as gentle. "You must not say—that! I cannot bear——"

"Ah, my poor love, you, too, have feared lest the sins of the father might some day be visited on the son!" said Saxham with a strange mingling of pity and sorrow and exultation. "Well, now for your comfort, believe they will not be. Bawne is all yours, Lynette. Young as he is, he has learned to master Self and conquer Fear. Obedience, Duty, and Honour are welded into the metal of his character. If I had not been my boy's father, I should have envied that man—knowing what I have learned to-day. And therefore I do not grudge—I give freely——"

"You give—you do not grudge——" She suddenly wrenched away her hands and said in a tone that chilled Saxham:

"Owen, do you speak like this because you believe Bawne is—dead?"

The Doctor made answer:

"I believe that if God so decree our boy will yet be given back to us. As far as knowledge goes—except for one fact I am little wiser than you."

"I must know what that one thing is! You will tell me now, and all!"

The sun was rushing up over East London in a gloriole of golden fire. To her husband's thought she was like some slender Roman patrician at the stake, as she stood up against the background of flaming splendour, and waited to hear the worst.

## CHAPTER XLIII

### THE PLUNDERED NEST

If that story of the aëroplane over the North Sea in the thickening dark, fighting East against the side-thrust of the nor'-west gale, with the dropping revolutions and the hiccuping engine, had seemed desperate before, it was ghastly now. Saxham's last hope died as he told. When he had done, Lynette said with strange, unnatural composure:

"Perhaps I have loved our child too much, and that is why he is taken from me. . . . And yet how can a mother love by measure and by rule? Did Our Lady withhold any part of her love from her Divine Child? Did not the dearest of all earthly mothers say to me—in that waking Vision, the God-given reality of which I have never doubted—'*Be to a son of Owen's what I have been to you!*'"

Her strained composure gave way. Her face quivered and the tears broke forth. She nipped her trembling lips close and shut her quivering eyelids with her fingers, but the fountains were unsealed, and she wept. Perhaps it was better so. She dried her eyes presently, and yielding to Saxham's persuasions in that she consented to go and lie down, she came into his embrace and laid her arms about his neck and kissed him with wifely tenderness, saying:

"I will answer now, what you said a little while ago. You shall see under the only leaf of my heart, Owen, that has ever been folded down over a secret kept from you. When my boy was to be born, and I was weak and suffering, the doubt—the dread, that has haunted and tortured you, assailed me and made me wretched—for a little while. Then I gathered together, jealously, every noble, true and

brave thing you had ever done for me or for others; every good deed of kindness, every unselfish tender thought. I asked you to take me with you to visit your poorer patients. I saw their hollow eyes brighten and heard them bless you when you turned from their bedsides to carry comfort and help elsewhere. And I wrote down these things in a book. They shine from its pages like jewels. When I die it was to be given to Bawne. . . . It will be if he lives to come back to us. . . . There is a prayer at the end that, in His goodness, God might give me in my boy a man like you!"

He went with her to the door and looked after her earnestly as she passed down the corridor out of his sight.

Then he locked himself in, and went back to his chair at the consulting-room table. The bright boy had stood there beside him a few short hours before. He was there now, pleading with a silent voice, coaxing with unseen looks, tugging with invisible hands. He always would be. Though Time softened the mother's anguish of loss, there would be no forgetfulness for Saxham, the grim stern man whose nature was Fidelity. Other children might yet call the Dop Doctor father, but their little fingers would never blur the imprint of the firstborn's babyish hand upon his heart.

Perhaps you can see the man, wan and haggard and unshaven, trying to attend to the pressing correspondence that had accumulated since the previous noon. Even as, to the shrill crying of the Fleet bugles, a windy grey day broke over the choppy Solent, showing the huge pageant of Sea Power ready for the King.

Down forty-mile avenues of floating steel fortresses one might follow Majesty, with a great muster of Naval seaplanes and aëroplanes manœuvring somewhat wildly overhead.

As Saxham sat there with Fate's trident rankling in him, those lights he had spoken of were burning behind closely-curtained windows at the Admiralty and at the Foreign

Office, and at the Belgian and German Embassies. In Berlin and Vienna, in Brussels and Paris and St. Petersburg —later to cast off its Teutonic name in loathing and be Petrograd—similar phenomena might have been observed. "Austria was going to take some step," as Prince Lichnowsky had nervously stated to Britain's Foreign Secretary, adding that he regarded the situation as very uncomfortable. And the German Foreign Secretary ingenuously confided to the British Chargé d'Affaires in Berlin that it was the intention of Austria-Hungary to offer Serbia a pill which she could not swallow, in the Note demanding the removal of all officers and functionaries guilty of propaganda against the Dual Monarchy, presented by Baron Giesel at Belgrade, on the 24th of July. The ultimatum was to be accepted or rejected within forty-eight hours, a sweeping proviso, in which one recognises the Hohenzollern touch.

The world trembled on the brink of Armageddon. Men even then were doubtful as to the issue. It might yet, some said, be Peace. But if Man, who arrives at conclusions by intellectual processes, was unsure, not so things that are guided merely by Instinct. Like the wise creatures of Natal and the Transvaal and Bechuanaland in 1900, these knew quite well that War was in the air.

It is on record that in these days preceding the Great Calamity, huge droves of wild pig, great herds of deer and small bands of the rarer elk, with bears, hares, martens, and foxes, evacuated the forests of Bavaria and South Germany for the mountain fastnesses of Switzerland. Immense flights of birds not usually migratory, partridges, pheasants, grouse, plover, wild-doves and water-fowl went South with the animals. Under cover of night the colossal game-preserves of East Prussia emptied into Poland—their furred and feathered peoples passing into the labyrinthine swamps of the Russian Dnieper and Dniester—spreading the news, sending the alarm before them:

"*Man is coming, and with him War!*"

Man was coming. That strange trembling of the earth had warned its creatures, even before the tramp, tramp, tramp of millions of marching feet, the rumbling that betokened the slow but sure approach of Titanic death-engines, told Fine Ears to seek safety in flight, before the cataclysm of human flesh and iron and steel, and chemicals a thousand times more deadly, rolled down to overwhelm, and destroy. Hence through those July nights the sound of rushing wings above, and stealthy pads, and trotting hoofs, and heavy bodies crashing through sedge and brake and underbrush, hardly for a moment ceased. Puffs of sweet wild breath, and musky odours from hidden lairs; tufts of hair upon the thorns, and crowded spoor upon the dust of the forest-paths or the mud of the river-banks, told of their going, to those who were skilled to read such signs. But the same mysterious instinct that urged them to flight, bade the eagle and vulture that prey upon carrion, the raven and owl and crow, the wolf and lynx be on the alert, for the table of Earth would shortly be spread for them as never before in the whole History of War. And their hoarse croaking and hooting and baying and barking answered: War, War, War!

## CHAPTER XLIV

### PATRINE REMEMBERS

PATRINE knelt beside the bed in her charming chintz-draped, white-enamelled room at Harley Street, and clumsily thanked God for having taken away von Herrnung. She petitioned that darling Bawne might be quickly found and brought back, and that if he were not, Lynette might not die. And she wound up with 'Our Father,' rather imperfectly remembered, and got into bed wondering whether Sherbrand would be pleased if he could know her not quite as irreligious as she had boasted—and lay revelling drowsily in the comfort of cool lavender-scented linen, until she fell asleep.

She had not tasted sleep for nights: age-long nights of broad staring wakefulness. Now Somnos, the gentle brother of Thanatos, took her and lapped her divinely round. She felt herself drifting away on a wide-flowing tide of deep sweet restfulness. Then it was as though an electric light were suddenly switched on in the dark galleries of her brain. Insomnia, the malevolent hag-witch, jests thus merrily with her victims, suffering them to taste sleep, and then whisking the cup away. Like many other practical jests, this ends in breakdown and brain-fever, or drives its victims to the chemist for sleepy drugs, and to the madhouse subsequently.

In the middle of the dazzling cocoon-shaped patch of brightness thus created, Patrine recognized the outlines of an ornamental fountain that occupied the centre of the vestibule leading to the supper-room of the Upas Club. Executed in the New Art style of sculpture, of white and black, and tawny marble, it was shaded by tall palms with gilded leaves.

On low pedestals rising from the rim of the shallow oval basin of the fountain were three nude life-sized shapes delicately tinted, with gilt hair, carmined lips, darkened eyebrows, vague round eyes of pale blue. They had the flattened breasts and narrow hips of masculine adolescence with women's faces and shoulders, arms and thighs. One held a finger hushingly on its lip; another was putting on a black vizard through which its pale eyes peeped slyly, the third was smiling over the rim of a golden drinking-cup. The Three were sharing a pleasant secret between them—or so it had seemed that night to Patrine.

After complying with certain formalities, and paying a heavy fee for admission, Patrine with her friend had passed through to a wonderfully decorated supper-room with a big grill at the end, where white-capped cooks were busy with savoury things. Wind and strings filled the room with great waves of music. Liveried attendants were serving champagne in crystal jugs to men and women seated supping at the daintily-appointed tables. The hot eyes and lividly-pale or purple-flushed faces of many of the revellers, already told their tale of excess.

The champagne at a guinea a jug, a speciality of the Upas, had seemed excellent to Patrine. She was out for enjoyment, and fizz made you feel top-hole. They had supped—was it lobster Américaine or grilled oysters that had preceded the other things?—when there came a change in the music. The unseen orchestra sighing and thrilling forth the amorous phrases of *Samson et Dalila*, leaped all at once into another familiar theme. To wit, the dance of the Jaguars in the Jungle, with its wail, clang, clash and growl as of strange, discordant, exotic instruments.

"Drums covered with serpent-skin, gombos of elephant-tusk, human skull-rattles and all the paraphernalia of Voodoo," to quote Lady Beauvayse.

Couples rose, and began passing out through a wide curtained exit at the farther end of the supper-room. The

music grew madder. Patrine, laughing, took von Herrnung's offered arm.

"Now," he told her, "you are going to see something that is very *chic!* We shall dance in the Hall of the Hundred Pillars!"

"How frightfully ripping!" said Patrine.

Thus they joined the mob of people—a singularly quiet mob,—and passed through the heavy, curtained entrance. The much-talked-of Hall was merely a big circular ballroom, lighted by groups of electric lilies, set about with pillars of tinted glass, slanting from a dado of black marble, ending at a broad frieze of black beneath the ceiling-dome. Theatrical and tawdry, gaudy and glittering, the scheme of decoration reminded Patrine of the inside of a solitaire marble. The walls of fierce bright orange were striped in curving oblique and transverse lines of black-and-silver, the silver dome was decorated with similarly curving lines of orange-and-black.

To the strange barbaric music of the dance from São Paulo men and women were gyrating and posturing, gliding and pausing, as other men and women had done at the Milles Plaisirs. Presently Patrine and her friend were revolving like the others, in the Valse with the hesitations and the Tango steps in it. You had only to know Tango and the thing came easily—or you imagined it did, after so much champagne. Reflected in the wall and ceiling-mirrors the girl had seen herself, twisting and twirling amidst the mob of dancers, with her head thrown back, and her long eyes blazing, and her wide red mouth laughing wantonly, before the black-and-orange-and-silver walls, the silver-and-black-and-orange dome spun giddily round her with the mob of dancers. Dazed, she had shut her eyes. She had felt herself being hurried somewhere—out of the pillared dancing-hall. . . .

She shivered, lying there in the sunshine remembering. . . . She recalled von Herrnung's face as they had passed

out of velvet-curtained, soundless darkness into a tapestry-hung, softly-carpeted corridor. The inner angles of the eyebrows were lifted, the laughing mouth under the red-rolled moustache displayed the big white teeth in a tigerish way. The pupils of his eyes were dilated, the irises pale as water. He had looked at her curiously, and said with a strange accent:

"So, Isis, you are mine now!"

"I suppose so!"

"I did not suppose so. The experience has been very real for me. Shall we go back—or would you prefer——"

She said with her face turned from him sullenly:

"I should prefer to go—to where I live!"

He had been loth to let her go. Then under a promise of renewal of those strange, shameful, secret relations, he had wrapped her theatre-mantle about her, and helped her arrange her lace scarf about her head, and taken her through a passage back to the vestibule where the three ambiguous statues stood about the central fountain, upon whose restless jet of water played shifting lights of different hues. By some arrangement of those who had planned the Upas, there faced you as you issued with your companion from the furtive side-passage the figure that had its finger on its smiling, carmined lips. . . .

And then—the stale air of London at dawn in midsummer. In the shabby side-street where long ranks of private cars stood waiting, von Herrnung had signalled the chauffeur of one of them—could the man have been the German who had leered at her that day at Hendon?—and then he had put her in, and followed her, and taken her back to Berkeley Square. . . .

It irked her to remember that she had told to the sleepy manservant who had admitted her at 3 A. M. an absolutely supererogatory falsehood to account for her return at that belated hour. For Lady Beau wouldn't have bothered if you'd arrived with the milkman, so long as you turned up

smiling at her bedside with your fountain-pen, and her coroneted paper-pad, when she'd had her early grape-fruit, and roll, and coffee, and was ready to tackle her morning mail.

Patrine must be discreet. Cautious. Must tell no lies of the unnecessary kind. For even though von Herrnung had been removed, just when his attitude had become formidable and menacing—there might yet be pitfalls of her own digging to brave and shun.

Pitfalls . . . Perils . . . As she lay wakeful, conscious through shut eyelids of the white mouldings of the ceiling her face was turned to, suddenly a keen sharp terror ran her through. She had heard her own voice say to von Herrnung:

"My God! Can't you understand that I ask nothing better than never to see nor hear of you again!"

He had mocked her with his hateful smile, and she had not understood.

"Under no—possible conditions? Just think a bit, my dear! Because—to burn one's boats behind one—that is not prudent at all!"

And later:

"You give me to understand that whatever happens—*whatever happens*—you will have nothing more to do with me?"

Idiot!—besotted idiot! She leaped up in the bed, visualising the peril, clearly as though a shutter had snapped back within her brain. Horror froze her, realising the shame she might live to bring upon those who loved Patrine. Uncle Owen . . . Lynette . . . Bawne. . . .

Mildred and Irma were minor considerations, shadowy silhouettes, negative quantities. Neither Irma nor Mildred had ever loved Patrine. Dad had though. Poor, dear Dad! She was glad he wasn't alive now. And Margot . . . Would Kittums cut one if—that happened? And—Sher-

brand! A blush burned over her, and she flung herself face downwards, burying her scorching face among the pillows, stifling the scream that the sheer torture wrung from her, by nipping a fold of the smooth linen in her teeth.

So she lay and writhed on the red-hot griddle of her anguished recollection, until a neat housemaid knocked at the door and brought her morning tea. And as she set down the emptied cup, someone else knocked, and opened the door softly, and Patrine turned—to meet the look of Lynette.

And then, though her struggling conscience warned her that she was unworthy to be held in arms so pure, she cried out wildly, and felt herself enfolded, and the fierce emotional tumult within her broke forth in wild sobs and drenching tears. She heard herself saying:

"I would have given my life over and over to have saved you from grief like this!"

And yet these were not the words she would have spoken. We are actors often and often when we least suspect ourselves, even when Calamity with one swift stroke of the scalpel has divided the palpitating flesh and quivering nerves down to the living bone.

"I would have given my life!" she wept, and Lynette seated by the bedside and bending over her, answered tenderly:

"I know it, my kind heart! You have always loved him. You wished him not to go—you begged Owen not to allow——"

There was unutterable loyalty in the breaking of the sentence: "He thought it best. I trust my husband," said the sweet voice. "But yet I thank you, dear one, for your loyalty to me."

"Don't touch me! I'm not fit!" Patrine stammered, resisting the mothering, encircling embrace. But the cup of pure sweetness was held to her feverish lips, she craved it too much to thrust it from her. You can see her coming out of

the bed in a galumphing outburst of passionate, remorseful tenderness:

"Here is my place!—here!" she gulped out brokenly, hiding her wet face on the elder woman's knees. Together they made a group not unlike Bouguerau's great canvas of the Consolatrix, save that there was no dead, lovely boy lying amidst the scattered petals of the fallen roses on the stone. Perhaps if there had been and the worst known, Bawne Saxham's mother could hardly have suffered more.

Not to understand . . . not to be sure. To be bereaved, and never to know just how the Beloved was taken from you. . . . Can there be anything more fantastically horrible than this, the fate of thousands of sorrowing women since the beginning of the Great War?

It was Sunday morning, brilliant and hot even for July weather. The clangour of church-bells mingled with the clashing of milk-cans, and the scent of pot-roses mingled with the hot smell of London in midsummer. Lynette shivered in spite of the sultriness, and looked down at the girl, spilt out at her knees under the meretricious splendour of her dead beech-leaf hair. She did not—how could she?—fathom the secret of such wretchedness, but love and pity flooded her heart, thawed out of its frozen misery by the vital warmth of the contact. She drew the unresisting arms upwards and about her, and lifted the prone head and took it to her bosom, saying:

"My poor girl! My dear Patrine!"

They were silent awhile. Then Lynette asked, her soft breath stirring the heavy tresses:

"Why did you do this, dearest? Wasn't it sufficiently beautiful?"

Patrine choked out, blazing crimson to the tips of her little ears:

"No! At least!—It is hideous now and *he* hated it! I —I had to tell him," a sob and a laugh tangled together, "it was the effect of Paris air!"

Lynette smiled, though the golden eyes were running over: "Bawne thinks so much of you, always!"

"I don't deserve that any one should!"

"Nobody shall speak ill before me of any one I care for! Why did you start?"

For a vision had flashed into the brain of Patrine, of all the world mocking and jeering and vilifying, and Saxham and Lynette upholding and defending David's daughter, who had brought disgrace upon them. She lifted her head and released herself almost roughly from Lynette's embrace. She stooped down and took the hem of Mrs. Saxham's gown and kissed it, and rose up looking wonderfully big and stately, and extraordinarily tall.

"I love you!" she said in her large warm voice. "You are the best woman I ever met or shall meet, and I am a rotten bad hat! Not worth a penn'orth of monkey-nuts, take my word for it! But—if somebody like you had been my mother—perhaps there'd have been something to show for it to-day."

Lynette might have replied, but just then through the quiet house, unnaturally still without the boyish voice and the boyish laughter, and the clumping of little thick-soled brogues upon the stairs and in the passages, there sounded the sharp whirring ting-a-ting of the hall telephone-bell. She turned and was gone with no more noise than a thrush makes in departure. Left alone, Patrine threw on her bath-robe over the thin nightgown of revealing transparency, lined with the opulent beauty that captures the desires of men, and looked at her fair reflection in the long cheval-glass, smiling with something of the subtlety of the androgynous genius of the Upas Club fountain—the figure that faced the guests as they entered, tying a vizard over its mocking eyes.

"You're worse even than I thought you!" Patrine said calmly to Patrine, "but now you know what *he* meant by what he said, you're not going to trust to Chance and Luck.

You're going—for Uncle Owen's sake, and Aunt Lynette's, and Bawne's—and Mother's and Irma's and your own—don't pretend you're a victim!—to marry Sherbrand, the Flying Man!"

Not a notion of any possible or eventual wrong or injury to Sherbrand troubled her conscience. She had yet to develop on the side of moral sensitiveness. Responsibility towards God, and duty towards her neighbour—the sense of these two obligations that are the foundation and corner-stone of Christianity—had not as yet awakened in Patrine.

She liked Sherbrand. It troubled her more that he had not the *cachet* of one of the great public Schools, than to know him poor, with his four hundred *per annum*—as the proverbial church-mouse. But she herself was not altogether penniless. There would be a hundred and fifty pounds a year for Patrine when she married; derived from moneys bequeathed to his daughter's children by Grandpapa Lee Hailey, strictly tied up and protected by various legal provisos, from depredations on the part of the unknown possessive male.

Five hundred and fifty between them. Anyhow, she told herself, that was better than a jab in the eye with a burnt stick. How soon might the marriage be brought off? One must bend one's energies to the solving of that question. How many sleepless nights—they were horribly unbecoming!—lay between Patrine and Security? The Fear that lurked in her dried her palate at the question. She felt like the runner of a Marathon fainting in sight of the goal.

# CHAPTER XLV

## FLOTSAM FROM THE NORTH SEA

On Monday morning, July 20th, under a flying double-column of Naval Goody Two Shoes and aëroplanes, the King led forth his Fleets for tactical exercises in the Channel. There were pictures on the screens at the music-halls that night and for many nights after, that evoked from huge audiences tremendous outbursts of patriotic clapping. Hence first blood in the Great War scores to Lil, belonging to the most ancient of all professions—who had accepted the invitation proffered by a Teutonic stranger to join the familiar crowd on the Empire Promenade.

The German paid for drinks. A friend joined him. There were more drinks, and the two men began to talk, discussing the *ultimatum* expected from Austria-Hungary, and the inevitable refusal of Belgrade to eat Vienna humble-pie. War with Russia must ensue. They were cheering in Berlin that night for *Krieg mit Russland*.

"It must come sometime," said Lil's patron in an undertone to his crony. "Why then should it not happen now?"

"War with Russia means war with France!" the other returned in the same key.

"And war with France a reckoning with these pig-dogs!" snarled Lil's temporary owner. "If the Serbians and Russes are to be smacked—good! If the French—good also! If the English, a thousand times the better!"

"Let us hope," said the more placable Teuton, emptying his second liqueur-glass of Kümmel—"that it will not be this time as at the affair of Agadir!"

"We are ready!" said Lil's patron with an oath. "We have seven millions of men ready, and two thousand millions

of cartridges, and for shell—one would not have dreamed the world held so much steel packed with super-explosive. No, no! *Diesmal wird es nicht sein wie in der Agadir!*"

He inquired as they left the bar and moved to where Lil, steeped in the Pictures, was standing at the front of the Promenade:

"What are these *Gottverflucht* jackasses braying about?"

The jackasses were lustily cheering the portrait of Admiral Sir John Rushworth Jellicoe, Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet—now flung upon the screen. And the jackasses got upon their feet with a sound as though the packed house were tumbling to pieces, and the Orchestra changed on the final bar of "Rule Britannia!" and the more belligerent of the two Teutons leaned over the barricade and hissed malignantly, as wind and strings crashed tumultuously into "God save the King!"

The row broke out in the Promenade as the Royal portrait flashed out and faded. A German voice swore shrilly, another expostulated, and a woman screamed and screamed. . . .

"'Ere! What's up, what's up now along o' you, young woman?" demanded a burly gold-braided Commissionaire, thrusting through the staring crowd that had gathered. He dragged Lil, still screeching and clawing, from the windpipe of her dishevelled patron, adding, "Do you call this pretty be'aviour? I'm ashamed o' you—I am!"

"He hissed. . . . The——hissed the King!" Lil gasped, scarlet and vituperative and still clawing. "Let me git at 'im! Let me——"

"No, hold her tight! It is a lie! She is drunk!" snarled the German who had hissed. His necktie, a choice thing in Berlin haberdashery, much sported on the Unter den Linden, was plucked up by the roots, and a broad bleeding scratch adorned his flushed and angry features. But at the suggestion that he should give the offender in charge of the Police, he melted with his companion into the thinnest of

thin air, and Lil did not spend the night in the cells at Wine Street Police-Station. There ought to have been a paragraph in the *Daily Teller* or the *Morning Wire*, but it was crowded out by the report—in leaded type—of von Herrnung's death and that of the boy, his volunteer passenger, the only son of Dr. Owen Saxham, M.D., F.R.C.S., M.V.O., whose distinguished share in the Defence of Gueldersdorp would always be remembered, etc., etc., even now that the frank, manly, and courageous policy of General Botha had established permanent and solid ties of friendship between the Briton and the Boer.

A sudden freak, perhaps a private bet, had induced the deceased officer, Captain Count von Herrnung of the Prussian Field Flying Service, son of a distinguished official of the German Imperial Foreign Office, and hero of the two days' flight from Hanover to Paris in the previous April,—to essay the crossing to Germany at a late hour, and in the face of a threatening gale. Another paragraph recorded how the wreck of the monoplane, "Bird of War" (wrongly described as "the property of Fanshaw's Flying School"), "had been found by a passenger-steamer of the Hamburg Line, bound for Newcastle, floating derelict in the North Sea."

A telephone-call followed the ring that had heralded the stroke of Fate's scimitar on that thick bull-neck of Saxham's. He answered it through the roaring in his ears of the North Sea waters that had drowned the boy.

"Are you there?" came in the voice of the friend so toughly tried, so faithfully trusted. "You have heard the report? Your voice tells me you have! Hope, man!—hope!—against everything go on hoping!"

The thick slow answer came stumbling over the wire:

"Have I—grounds for hope?"

Came the prompt reply:

"I say yes! Dare to despair, when you hear that from me!"

"God bless you, General!"

"Have you—you have not told her?"

Saxham answered, steadying his twitching lips:

"No!—I thought I should like to keep my wife for another hour or two!"

There was a crisp, sharp order:

"Go to her now, and steel her with this from me—that the aëroplane, when found, had been thoroughly gutted. The First Officer, who is English and one of our men, swears positively to this. The 'Gnome' engine had been taken out of the stirrups, and the gyroscopic hovering-gear removed wholesale. Do you comprehend that this means—a pre-arranged thing? Listen!—I'll pound it into you, confound you! Once—they have been picked up! Twice—they have been picked up! Three times—they have been picked up! Go to your wife and tell her so from me!"

The speaker rang off.

But he knew discouragement. The rapid march of events across the page of History since the Saturday of von Herrnung's flight from Hendon had elicited a check from Official Headquarters.

Without signing the book that all visitors must sign, and cooling your heels in the anteroom, you are to be admitted to the private sanctum at the War Office, Whitehall, and the presence of Britain's Secretary of State for War. See him, seated square and upright in a high-backed leather-covered arm-chair behind a big green cloth covered mahogany desk, a thinnish, wide-shouldered man, with a nose of the beaky type, brown crisp hair sprinkled with grey receding from tall sunburned temples, and deep-set smallish blue eyes, a little weakened by much recent poring over State documents by electric-light.

The British Government found it incompatible with its present line of Foreign Policy to take steps towards the recovery of the Foulis Papers. For forty-five years their duplicates had lain in safe-keeping at the War Office.

They were there now. That was the Minister's chief point.

The Foulis War Engine had never been patented—never acquired by the British War Office. Such distinction or favour as the tenth Earl had received from Government had been conferred in recognition of the dead man's gallant services to his country, not as the reward of his inventive gift. *Ergo*, the British Government could not concern itself with the theft of the original Plans from Gwyll Castle. To pursue and arrest the thief was the affair of the Head of the Clanronald family. If his lordship chose to drop the matter!—the Colonel's celebrated Parliamentary shrug and smile conveyed the rest.

There was another point still. If the Plans of the War Engine of Clanronald had once been seen by—alien eyes, the possession of the formulas did not matter two pence. The cat that had grown grey in the bag was out of it for good. In the Colonel's opinion—a priceless asset in the highly delicate condition of International Politics—a more formidable document than the Foulis Plan was the Note which was even then being placed by Austria's Representative at Belgrade before the Serbian Council of Ministers. This, in conjunction with Germany's deferred answer to our proposal of a Conference of Representatives of the Great Powers, and the sudden, secret return of the Emperor of Germany to Berlin—"justifies Admiralty orders that have been issued," said the Minister, "directing our First—ahem!—Battle Fleet, concentrated—as it happens!—at Portland, not to disperse for Manœuvre Leave."

The speaker, who had pushed back his chair and crossed his legs, looked very steadily at Sir Roland as this last sentence very quietly left his thin lips. Not a muscle twitched in the other's lean, keen face. The Minister went on:

"Thus I may hope I have made clear to you my view of

the situation. As for the Flying-officer, Count von Herrnung—we may presume him to have been—for no doubt he is drowned—a military spy. The German General Staff have a preference for employing men belonging to the higher social circles for work of this kind. Wonderfully organised, their system of strategical and political investigation!"

Sir Roland agreed:

"Wonderfully organised, when one goes closely into its ramifications—tracing and following them to their Headquarters in a certain underground office at the Wilhelmstrasse! But they fail in one thing. The kind of operations they contemplate can usually be deduced from the line of their reconnaissance!"

"And yet in the instance under consideration," hinted the Minister, "Count von Herrnung's intention of commandeering a machine from the Hendon Flying Ground seems to have been fairly well disguised!"

"Pardon me!" opposed Sir Roland, with quiet assurance. "He had no such intention when he arrived at Hendon. His orders were conveyed to him on the ground! And the haste with which he was got out of England with the brown satchel proves that his superiors did not dare to delay even for the precautionary measures, and that no copies nor photographs have been made of the Foulis MSS. and plans! Take it from me that the cat, if she has not already got to Germany, remains in the brown bag!"

"And the bag is somewhere in the North Sea. But it may be recovered," said the Minister, "with the body of von Herrnung."

The General returned, with a deepening of the lines upon his forehead, and at the angles of his mobile nostrils:

"It may be recovered, as you say. But *if* so, it will be found upon the body of the boy." He added, meeting the question in the tired eyes of the other man: "Some objection was made by Mr. Sherbrand—the owner of the now wrecked aëroplane—to von Herrnung's taking the satchel

with him in the pilot's pit. So—Mr. Sherbrand informs me—von Herrnung strapped it to the safety-belt that secured Saxham in his seat."

A gleam of interest warmed the frostiness of the Ministerial countenance:

"The boy . . . Ah! yes, as I think I mentioned before, I sympathise deeply with the boy's parents. He is a son of a personal friend of your own, I understand?"

"Dr. Saxham, sir, late attached to the Medical Staff at Gueldersdorp."

"Saxham—that is the name—and the child is the only one? Most sad and regrettable. And I think the paragraph in the *Wire* mentioned—one of your Boy Scouts?"

"One of my Scouts!" The Chief's bright eyes snapped as he added, "Very much to the honour of his troop. Very greatly to the credit of the Organisation—as I mean to prove to him should he happily survive to return!"

"Indeed? You interest me! Pray tell the story."

It was told, succinctly and crisply. He said quite warmly:

"I could hardly have credited! What pluck and energy! And to dare the thing—on the strength of a second flight! A boy like that should have lived! Good-bye, my dear General!"

He added, accompanying the visitor to his door:

"These are pleasant summer evenings to be wasted in London! A shower or so—and one could do a great deal of execution with the White Coachman on our Hampshire trout-rivers, sir!"

He spoke like an angler mildly peeved by deprivation of the sport he loved best, and even paused to tap the glass of a barometer hanging by the wainscot, on his way back to the writing-table littered with State papers, in defiance of the thin, shrill summons of the telephone-bell. . . .

So the General went away, owning to himself that the thing looked desperate. It was better for England that the

Plans of the Foulis War Engine should lie at the bottom of the North Sea, but what of his friend, what of his friend's wife?

The keen eyes were unwontedly dim as he reached the wide Turkey-carpeted landing, and the messenger caught a snatch of *The Flowers o' the Forest* whistled in slow time as his hurrying footsteps overtook the General. Would Sir Roland please to go back, was the gist of the message. The Minister had something further to communicate.

The War Minister was not alone. Two persons were with him—a tall man in civilian clothes who stood looking out of the window as one who had temporarily removed himself out of earshot, the other a slim and dapper Naval Secretary.

The "something further" proved to be the pith of an Admiralty communication just imparted. Early that morning a British Submarine on North Sea Patrol duty (we will call her E-131), upon returning to the surface to ascertain the cause of defective submergence, had discovered a brown leather lock-strap to be entangled with her aft diving-plane on the starboard side. A leather satchel firmly attached to the other end of the strap was jammed under the plane, and subsequently extricated by one of the men, from the collapsible.

Perhaps you can imagine the Lieutenant Commander stooping over the retrieved bit of flotsam, lying under the shaded electric light hanging over the narrow sliding table that pulled out from under his bunk in the officer's cabin—a place of privacy again, the steel bulkhead-doors being shut. For when you submerge they are all thrown wide so that the Commander's eye may traverse the whole length of an elongated engine-room, and see what every man is doing at his particular post, in a single flash.

The Commander's eye was screwed up in the vain endeavour to see under the flap of the locked satchel. He took up the thing and turned it in his hands, while the strap, soaked

and twisted by sea-water and engine-power, flapped upon his knees like a long frond of wet seaweed.

"Wonder who cut the strap?" Clumsily, as though by a blunt knife wielded by a numb hand—it had been hacked through, and the satchel scratched badly in the process. He went on: "Looks like some rich American globe-trotter's travelling-satchel. No picking these locks! One might negotiate 'em with the oxygen flame-puff—if it wasn't for the risk of damaging the wads of dollar bills that might possibly be inside. Nothing to be done but rip or cut the leather—and that seems to be made strengthy with metal, somehow!" He slipped the lean blade of a penknife between the strongly stitched edges. The satchel proved to be lined with thin plates of aluminium. "As easy to get inside as the Bank of England!" he grumbled, and so it proved, if the Bank of England has ever been negotiated with a bull-head tin-opener.

Inside the leather case lined with aluminium, a little sea-water had penetrated, patching with damp a small antique portfolio of pearly, bossy shark-skin exquisitely painted with birds and foliage by some old-world Japanese master of Art. The quaintly feeble lock, and corner-guards were of bronze, gold-inlaid with scowling fox-masks, and the inevitable chrysanthemum.

The Japanese lock gave at a twist of the penknife-blade and then the portfolio disgorged its loose sheaf of yellowed papers strung together by a clew of faded silken twist. Drawings to scale and plans: sheets of manuscript and pages covered with the symbols used in chemical formulas, scribed in a clear small rounded hand.

"Great Scott!—what's this?"

The ash from the Commander's neglected cigarette fell upon the topside of the precious manuscript. He blew it reverently off, and dug himself into the pile:

"H'm, hum!"

"*By Me, Robert Foulis, Seaman, Tenth Earl of Clanronald,*

*G.C.B., Admiral of the Red, Rear-Admiral of the British Fleet, and Marquis of Araman, etc., etc. Invented & Conceived Not in Hatred of Mankind, but in Defence of my Country and the Rights Beloved by Every True Briton——"*

"Marvellous old cock! And in 1854, when he was eighty if a day, he offers it for the fifth time to the British Government!"

"Busy, Owner? See you've got inside the prize-packet! My Christmas! what is it? Miss Araminta's Diary; 'FOUND AFTER FORTY YEARS!' or 'HOW I BROKE MY ENGAGEMENT WITH THE CURATE!'"

This from a young, exceedingly wet, and dirty Engineer Lieutenant, fresh from an interview with the damaged diving-plane, and smelling potently of castor-oil.

The Commander looked up, and strange things were in his eyes.

"You're pretty wide!" He added, speaking partly to the other man inside the Commander: "Jolly good thing we're on the Home trip. That main motor gives a lot o' trouble, and—suppose some purblind sailing ship crashed into us—and sent us to the bottom with THIS aboard. Great Sea Boots! It makes me crawl all down my back to think of it!"

The Second clattered down the steel ladder and filled the doorway with his burly personality.

"What makes you crawl? Don't say the leg o' mutton we bought Saturday from the skipper of that Grimsby trawler has gone back on us! Is that what the liar means by fresh meat?"

"If I told you, you'd crawl too. Or you'd think it a case of sunstroke—or D.T. of the deferred kind." The Commander stowed the papers back in the sharkskin case with gingerly carefulness that provoked the query whether he thought he had got hold of a new kind of floating mine, and elicited the retort:

"I don't think!—I know it!"

No one got anything more out of the speaker, who, pres-

ently, declining stewed mutton, whose wholesome savour amply certified to the moral character of the trawler's skipper, went to the Wireless and dispatched a pithy message to the Commander of E-131's particular Coast Defence station, and the news was flashed to Whitehall, to go forth ere long from thence over the world.

Sir Roland said, with that unwonted cloud dulling his bright eyes, and a certain huskiness of utterance:

"There's no other solution of the puzzle. Remembering that I had said to him, '*In an emergency, you might do good service to your country by destroying this!*' my Scout took the only course open to him—and dumped the satchel into the sea!"

The Minister admitted with characteristic reticence:

"Whether I concur with your theory or not, I must admit to you that the report received specifies that the strap had been cut. 'Hacked through' is the actual expression—and the back of the leather outer case scratched as though by a knife."

"It is vital that I should examine the strap and see those scratches!"

The Minister answered:

"To-morrow morning by twelve o'clock—I can obtain you an opportunity. The recovered valise, or wallet, or satchel, will be brought up to the Admiralty by the officer commanding E-131. She has not yet arrived in harbour. But the Commander will doubtless receive instructions as soon as he reports himself." He continued, gracefully ignoring his previous statement that the Government had decided not to interfere: "In the absence of the Earl of Clanronald, now yachting in Northern waters, it is obligatory that the War Office should take the matter in hand."

The very tall stranger had wheeled, and advanced to Sir Roland with a smile and an outstretched hand of greeting. We know how great a heart beat in its pulses. Its short,

hard grip spoke sympathy and understanding, though the voice was harsh and the light grey eyes stared out of the brick-burned, heavily-moustached face with the old sagacious, indomitable regard. He said after a word or two had passed, the Admiralty Secretary temporarily occupying the attention of the War Minister:

"By the way, you will be interested to hear something I have at first-hand from Clanronald. He has been, as perhaps you know, cruising with two ancient cronies, Lord Gaynor and Colonel Kaye, in his steam-yacht *Helga*, along the Danish West Coast of Jutland. He returns the richer by—what I may term a unique experience!"

Sir Roland said, meeting the Sirdar's eyes with great certainty:

"If I may guess at the nature of the experience, I should hazard that it was—an attempt in the kidnapping line?"

The other gave his short, gruff laugh:

"You have hit it. They carry a Wireless installation on the *Helga*, and sparked the story *via* Cullercoats to Bredingley, who was stopping a week-end at Doome. The yacht was at anchorage in the outer harbour of Esbjorg, some twenty-eight kilometres from the frontier of Danish-Germany. It was midnight. Everybody on board, including the watch, seems to have been asleep except Clanronald, who was roused by something scraping the side of the yacht. Presently he heard stealthy footsteps on deck, and whispering. He was squatting on his bunk with a brace of loaded revolvers and a Winchester repeating-rifle, when the intruders opened his cabin door!"

"Did any of them survive the intrusion? If so, Clanronald has—very much changed!"

The Sirdar returned, with the quirk of a smile lurking under the heavy moustache whose brown was getting flecked with grey:

"Well—the *Helga* has recently been re-enamelled, and Clanronald is faddy on the point of his new paint. Besides"

—the quirk deepened into a laugh— "he thought it would be more useful to take them as live specimens of the kind of material that goes to make up the crew of a German submarine."

They looked at each other, laughing. Sir Roland inquired:

"I venture to hope that while Clanronald was about it — he collected the submarine?"

"Unfortunately, no! And, very regrettably, the collapsible boat in which the raiders had made their midnight visit was swamped when the two others—there had been four of them!—jumped into her to make off. Presumably they could swim and were picked up by the submarine—Undersea Boat No. 14—according to the testimony of one of the prisoners. The other of whom—an officer and leader of the foray—took poison, and was found dead in the cabin that served for his prison-cell. The other, a mere seaman, is too dazed with terror to be intelligible—according to Clanronald. But the whole thing is interesting!"

"Hugely and instructively. As shedding," said the General, "a certain light upon a mystery that baffled the wiseacres in 1913. I refer to the mysterious disappearance of the engineer-inventor Riesl from his cabin aboard a Hamburg Line, Leith-bound steamer. With a contract in his pocket for the supply of crude-oil-consuming marine motor-engines to the Navy of a Power—other than the German Government!"

"Possibly!—possibly! One never knows what forces are working beneath the surface." The set, brick-dust face and grave sagacious eyes of the great soldier seemed to testify to his complete innocence of anything like a *double-entendre.*

He ended as the War Minister dismissed the secretary from the Admiralty, and turned again to Sir Roland, saying in his most pompous tones:

"Twelve o'clock to-morrow, then, General. Meanwhile,

pray convey to his parents my admiration—in which I feel the First Lord will concur—of the remarkable qualities manifested by young Saxham! Astonishing devotion to duty, and courageous self-reliance! He should have lived! —he would have made a noble man!"

Came the curt reply:

"He is alive now! I am convinced of it!"

The Minister gave the speaker a glance of incredulity. It was so very clear to the War Secretary's logical mind that the child and the man were drowned. But the harsh voice of the great Field Marshal, England's most faithful friend, who was to succeed him in his place of power, answered for him:

"One would expect you to stick to your guns, General. Should you prove right before I sail for Egypt, bring him to see me!"

"I promise that, faithfully, my lord."

They shook hands and parted. It seemed a long week until the morrow when the secret of Robert Foulis came home to roost at Whitehall. But it ended, and twelve o'clock brought that keenly-desired opportunity of examining the cut lock-strap and the empty, knife-scored satchel in the official sanctum of the First Lord Commissioner for the Admiralty, and in the presence of that functionary.

"There seems—ah!" the First Lord mounted a pair of gold-rimmed pince-nez, "to be something in the nature of an address scratched upon the leather!"

Sir Roland corroborated, after a brief inspection:

"There is, most undoubtedly. And the address is that of the London Headquarters of our Organisation, No. 1000, Victoria Street."

"Dear me—dear me! Most remarkable! Now here," said the Right Hon. gentleman, breathing asthmatically and twinkling through the gold-framed pebbles, "is something not so easily deciphered. A rude symbol, something

like a *fleur-de-lis* with letters at either side, and a few other meaningless scrawls!"

"It is not a *fleur-de-lis*," Sir Roland answered, "but a fox-mask, with the number and signature of my Scout. He belonged to the Fox Patrol, 331st London. Here is his troop-number, 22, and here are his initials, B.M.S.—Bawne Mildare Saxham. It is perfectly in order! In this way he would be expected to sign a communication to his fellow-Scout. And the marks below, I can assure you, are not meaningless. They convey that there is trouble of a very definite kind. In addition the arrow, here, taking the top of the satchel for the North as in a map—signifies, 'Road to be followed East.'" He added with a stiffening of the facial muscles that made the keen face as hard as a mask carved in boxwood:

"And followed it shall be!"

It had been decided amongst those who controlled such matters that the British Public were to be fed with the tale. The tapes began to run out at the newspaper-offices as the General took leave of the First Lord and the War Minister and got into his waiting car, and sped away to Harley Street to tell the Dop Doctor how the Saxham pup had proved worthy of his breed.

The evening papers made great marvel out of the story, and at all the street corners of London and the suburbs broadsheets lined the gutters, proclaiming in huge inky capitals:

"MYSTERIES OF THE SEA. EXTRAORDINARY ATTEMPTED CAPTURE OF BRITISH YACHTSMAN BY PIRATES IN DANISH WATERS! MIRACULOUS RECOVERY OF CLANRONALD WAR-PLAN! SUBMARINE IN NORTH SEA FOULS BAG CONTAINING PRICELESS HEIRLOOM STOLEN FROM GWYLL CASTLE! LAST MESSAGE OF HERO BOY SCOUT!"

## CHAPTER XLVI

### AT NORDEICH WIRELESS

In the face of the outrunning tide, Undersea Boat No. 18 had nosed her way from Norderney Gat to Nordeich, by the deep-dredged low-water channel of which Luttha had told. The boy had been roused by the kick of a foot shod with a heelless rubber boot, out of a dog-sleep on the vibrating deckplates of the men's cabin, under the white glare of the electric globes. The man who kicked him hauled away the blue blanket, and pitched him his clothes, yet moist and heavy with sea-water, ordering him in broken English to get into them quickly to go ashore.

The boy obeyed, stiffly, for he yet ached in every limb from the resuscitative rubbing administered by Petty Officer Stoll and his assistant—and his temples throbbed, and there was a singing in his ears. Perhaps that was from the smell of the petrol! One breathed petrol—devoured tinned meat stew petrol-flavoured, and drank soup and coffee made with petrol—judging by the tang upon the palate—on board the German submarine.

The hatch at the top of the dripping steel ladder was open, letting in the smell of the sea tanged with the odours of fish and rotten seaweed and sewage. One emerged through the manhole into a strange, windless woolly world. Through a weeping woolly-grey mist, grey, greasy-looking water lapped and licked against a weedy jetty of grey stone alongside which U-18 lay with the fog smoking off her whitey grey painted steel skin. A bluff-bowed galliot, a yacht or two, and some lighters laden with bricks and cement sat on the blue-grey mud of a small harbour; grey and white sea-gulls were feeding on the mud, gaily-painted row-boats were lying on the shelving beach of weedy sand.

To the right-hand a lighthouse or beacon made a yellow blur in the prevailing woolliness. Behind one, the foggy land seemed mixed up with the foggy sea, even as the yellow-white curd mixes with the whey in a dish of rennet. North, the intermittent beam thrown from a lighthouse came and went in sudden winks. Facing to the mainland again, one made out east of the quay an aggregation of tiled roofs and chimneys, and a wooden church-spire with a quaint gilded weathercock. Running south were black and white signal-posts, buffers, and a big, barn-like railway station. Beyond, the fog came down so like a curtain, that the shining metals of the permanent way ran into it and ended as sharply as though they had been cut off.

There was a trampling of feet on the steel ladder. Heads showed through the manhole, and a rough hand caught the boy by the collar of his pneumatic jacket and jerked him out of his betters' way. Luttha appeared in his panoply of yellow oilskins, passed aft and went up on the platform, where his second officer and another stood together at the rail. Von Herrnung followed, dough-pale, and wearing an old Navy cap in place of his goggled helmet, and a junior officer came after. They brought the tang of schnapps with the smell of their oilskin coats. The boy had seen them drinking and nodding to each other at the narrow table in the officer's cabin, as he had hurried into his clothes.

"*Gute Reise! Viel Glück!*" Luttha had shouted to von Herrnung, and waved his hand with a heartiness that did not seem quite real.

"*Auf wiedersehen, besten Dank!*" von Herrnung had called back to the Commander, and set his foot upon the one-rail gang-plank by which a seaman had connected the submarine with the quay. And then he had drawn it back, as though the salty plank had burned him. For a party of tall grey soldiers with brown boots and belts, and spiked helmets covered with grey stuff like their clothing, came tramping along the quay with bayonets fixed, and halted at a

harsh order from their officer—and von Herrnung, with a shiny grey face, and grey lips under his red moustache, had croaked out meaningly to Luttha:

"My thanks for this, Herr Commander! We will settle the score one day!"

He went on then, and the officer arrested him. And while Bawne stood staring, taking in the scene, another brutal hand had grabbed him by the scruff—lifted him as a boy lifts a puppy—and slung him on to the stones of the quay.

"You come with us!" Somebody spoke to him in English. It was von Herrnung, and his eyes were poisonous with hate. "You bear your share in this, Her Dearest." This was a curious nickname by which the Enemy was often to address Bawne. "Where I go you will go also!—do you understand?"

The officer said something harshly, making an imperious gesture with his drawn sword, and von Herrnung saluted and fell silently into place between the grey files. Then the party marched along the quay between rows of store-houses with doors painted in broad horizontal stripes of black and white, and passed through a yard and a big open gate at the end of it, with a black and white sentry-box, and a grey-uniformed spike-helmeted sentry on duty outside the gate. The sentry presented arms, and the party swung through, and struck into a wide main-road that crossed the railhead, a sandy road with a dyke at either side of it, that followed the curve of the shore-line east.

Beyond the shore-line the North Sea fog came down, blank and drab as an asbestos curtain, waiting a westerly breeze to roll inland and blot out everything. Between shore and road were the clumped houses of the fishing-village, and a church with a wooden spire, shaped like an old-fashioned needle-case. Sand-dunes, covered with sea-holly and bent grass, came up to the road. But on the other side of the road, beyond the dyke, the eye traversed

a wide expanse of dead, flat fenland, drained by a many-branched creek.

Set in the midst of the fenland were buildings of some kind. One thought of barracks in the same enclosure with a martello tower or a powder-magazine, like that in Hyde Park. But two strange landmarks sticking up into the foggy sky altered the character of the flat-roofed structure of grey stone standing in a wide expanse of gravel enclosed by a strong wooden fence, stained with some drab weather-resisting composition, and entered by an imposing pair of spike-topped gates. A wide dyke full of sluggish water girdled the fence. You crossed by a wooden swing-bridge leading to the big gates. When you approached them by the road that branched from the main-road at right-angles, you realised the immense height of two hollow triangular towers of grey-painted steel latts and girders that straddled over the flat roof of the squat stone building —the shorter tower nosing up three hundred feet into the air, and its big brother more than double that height, sheathing its sharp point amongst the leaden-hued clouds, bellying full of moisture sucked up from the North Sea.

They looked alive to Bawne in a queer ugly way, throwing out their mile-long antennæ to the supporting poles, linking their metal guy-ropes to solid structures of stone and concrete, like colossal web-spinning insects, half-spider, half-mantis, wholly horrible. And they reminded him of the three tall Wireless masts rearing over the Admiralty at Whitehall, and Marconi House, in the Strand, and the little one that straddled over the telegraph-cabin on Fanshaw's Flying Ground. And at the remembrance the salt tears overbrimmed his raw and burning eyelids, blotting out the muscular, vigorous backs of the men who walked in front of him, and his throat felt as choky as though he had swallowed a whole bull's-eye.

There was a sharp order to halt, and boots marked time on sandy gravel. A grey-uniformed soldier of the two on

guard outside the big spike-topped gates, flanked with a black-and-white sentry-box on either side, brought his bayonet to the slope and challenged sharply. A sergeant-major of the party stepped out and answered; the sentry bellowed:

"*Raus!*"

And with the ruffle of a side-drum, the gates swung open, the guard turned out of a stone guardhouse within, and the armed party with the prisoner and the boy marched into the gravelled courtyard. The gates shut, and von Herrnung was taken off to a block of buildings distant from the central erection with the Wireless towers. There was a clock over the doorway of the guardhouse. The hands indicated a quarter to four.

Bawne, standing shivering in the morning rawness, heard the infantry officer commanding the party say in a loud, harsh voice that the boy was to be kept close and sharply looked after. Then a heavy hand gripped him roughly by the collar, and the voice belonging to the grip shouted:

"At the Herr Lieutenant's orders!"

Whereupon the boy was summarily thrust before the gruff-voiced speaker to a shed behind the guardhouse—a shed whose planks were a-tremble at all their lower edges with glittering drops of North Sea fog. He was helped in with a kick, scientifically administered—the big key crashed in the lock—and one was free to sob one's bursting heart out, lying face downwards among the hard, clean, shining straw-trusses that covered the floor of beaten earth. Somehow the tears relieved, and merciful sleep came to the child, and presently he awakened under the oilskin coat that served for bed-covering, to the rustling of the straw under his head, and through one unglazed aperture that admitted light and air, shone a large, lucent moon—in her last quarter, with Saturn, blazing like a great blue diamond, at her pale and silvery side.

In the shed, which had been destined but luckily not used as a kennel for the Adjutant's Pomeranian boar-hound, the boy remained in durance vile for a period of several days. The drills and parades, the buglings and drummings that marked the ordinary course of garrison life, alone enlivened the cramped monotony. He was given coarse food and drink three times a day, and permitted to exercise for half-an-hour in charge of a corporal within the limits of the gravelled courtyard. Soldiers were drilling there on most of these occasions, big men in the brand-new green-grey uniform that seemed a kind of Service kit, and who regarded Bawne with looks of quite incomprehensible malignancy, and when their mouths were not closed by Prussian military discipline, made coarse or beastly jokes at his expense.

You are to suppose a pitifully unequal struggle on the part of the boy to maintain decency, cleanliness, and self-respect under these conditions, which would have ended in hopeless lethargy had the Saxham pup sprung from a feebler race. Two things helped him at this juncture. The Rosary he said in his straw lair at night, and certain stimulating reading contained in a sea-stained and grimy-paged Scout's Notebook, that nobody had seen him with, or having seen had thought it worth their while to take away. You can see him on the sixth morning of captivity squatting on his straw, poring over the Alphabet of the Morse Signalling Code, the Rules for First Aid, and so on, following the ten precepts of Scout Law.

"*Rule No.* 7. A Scout obeys orders of his patrol-leader or scout-master without question."

He nodded his head as he read the words and his heavy eyes brightened. He pushed back the dulled and rumpled hair from his forehead and straightened his hunched back.

"*Rule No.* 8. A Scout smiles and whistles under all difficulties. . . ."

The smile was bravely forced. He held up his head, filled his lungs with air, inflated his chest, pouted his lips,

and began to whistle *Rule Britannia.* And at the second bar, somebody booted the door heavily and a thick voice bellowed:

"*Halt den Mund!*"

It was the voice of the soldier who was Bawne's jailor, and the whistle quavered and broke down. And as the boyish heart swelled to bursting and the irrepressible tears brimmed over, a musical motor-horn, some distance off, sounded clearly and sweetly:

"Ta-rara-ta ra!" And a Prussian officer's voice drowned out the sweetness of the answering echo, shouting:

"*Achtung! Wache heraus!*"

Bugles sounded, side-drums beat, there was a crunching of heavy boots upon stone and gravel, followed by the click of presented arms, and the groaning of the heavy gates swung back. Amidst all these significant noises, you caught the purr and crackle of pneumatic tyres rolling over the wooden bridge into the courtyard. As they stopped short, a bugle sounded imperatively, and hoarse voices gave the order:

"*Helm ab!*"

And a multitudinous shout answered—a thick, short, crashing utterance that suggested the fall of a tree. Three trees fell crashing, and then in a little still of awe a sharp, hollow voice answered:

"*Danke, meine Kinden!*"

And the boy squatting, listening in the straw, was conscious of a queer tingling sensation that made his hair stiffen on his scalp and sent odd little waves of shuddering down the whole length of his spine. The voice was not melodious or powerful. But it set the nerves on edge, and made you wonder what he could be like—the man to whom it belonged. And the question made a picture in the mind, of a mouth with thin lips that were parched and discoloured, a cruel mouth, matching the harsh and hollow utterance.

The time crawled on and the sun climbed high. It must

have been noon or nearly when measured steps approached the shed, and the door was unlocked. This time a non-commissioned officer who had kicked Bawne yesterday caught hold of the boy, hauled him out of the shed, and made at the double towards the squat stone building bestridden by the pair of Wireless towers. Their intolerable shadows, the sun being nearly overhead, barred the big courtyard with wide lateral and diagonal bands and stripes of blackness. It was as though two Brobdingnagian spiders had spun there a pair of webs of incredible size.

There were soldiers on guard with fixed bayonets at the open doors, that led into the square low-ceiled stone vestibule. Before the two wide steps stood a bright yellow motor-car. It was big, roomy, and luxurious, with the Prussian eagle in black and red on both doors. A young officer in field-grey and flat cap sat immovable at the steering-wheel. At a little distance waited two other cars. Their chauffeurs wore a dark blue livery with silver braid and buttons, and these cars were black-enamelled and studiously plain.

Inside the vestibule were more sentries and a small body of soldiers, all with fixed bayonets. Also three dubious individuals in black uniform who might have been detectives or not. They were grouped outside a heavy door on the right hand as you entered. Despite the presence of so many persons a singular quiet reigned. Footfalls made no noise on the floor, presumably of stone, covered with thick, resilient red rubber. There were no windows, light being admitted from overhead by a skylight of thick opaline glass.

I have said that quiet reigned, but as the corollary of a sharp harsh voice that talked without cessation. It upbraided, denounced, interrogated; interrupted conjectural answers with contradiction; burst out anew into shrill denunciation, and switched off the current of abuse to pelt

its object with questions again. It rasped the nerves. Of the men who heard it some grew pale, others were red and sweated freely. When it broke off in a scream like a vicious stallion's neigh, a susurration of horror passed from one to another of the erect, silent, and rigid men waiting in the vestibule. The neighing scream was followed by a small commotion. The door opened, and a tall, grey-moustached, grey-cloaked cavalry officer, in a silver helmet crested with a perching eagle, demanded—Bawne's little German serving him once more at this juncture:

"Water! Immediately—a glass of water!" and vanished again.

An orderly got the water, passing out by another tall door in the centre of the vestibule and coming back with a filled tumbler on a china plate. One of the men in black snatched it from him and knocked officiously. But the harsh shrill voice had begun to rate again, and when the door was opened, a thick-set officer in a spiked infantry helmet, with a glittering gold moustache and sharp blue eyes twinkling through glittering gold pince-nez, waved the water away as though it had never been asked for.

"The boy!" he said, in a shrill falsetto whisper. "*Seine Majestät* wants the boy!"

Then it seemed as though twenty zealous hands propelled the boy towards the mysterious room's threshold. The officer in pince-nez grabbed his arm and pulled him briskly in.

## CHAPTER XLVII

### THE MAN OF "THE DAY"

You were in a square, singularly light, though windowless room immediately underneath the lower, pointed end of the biggest Wireless. The room was lighted along the top of the walls on two sides by oblong slabs of thick opaque glass with many ventilators controlled by levers. The huge metal ribs and supports of the colossal steel tower overhead were built deep into the solid stone masonry. Through a massive block of crystal glass—the insulator on which the pointed end of the mast rested, your vision was snatched up—up dizzily—through the vertical labyrinth of metal ribs and girders, until it ended at the inner extremity of the apex, seven hundred and fifty feet above. The shrill song of the wind amongst the steel ribs, and spars, and guy-ropes, whose ends were linked to reinforced steel beams or ground-anchors, sunk in heavy outside foundations of masonry, hardly reached one here. But from the dynamo-room that absorbed the space between this and the second Wireless chamber, you heard the deep moan of the Goldberg Alternator, its rotor speed maintained by a 500 horse-power Krafft engine, sunk, to lessen the tremendous vibration, in a solid steel and cement lined power-house, deep below the level of the soggy ground.

The boy's wide blue eyes took in the wonder and the strangeness of his surroundings. Lightness and whiteness, a ship-shape neatness, a scrupulous freedom from dust, a dazzling polish and burnish on surfaces or knobs or handles of wood, brass, or copper, characterised the place. About the walls were metal cylinders with pipes and induction-coils, frames supporting reels of wire in rows, and brass

things like pincers in rows above them; and above these, rows of shining crystal bull's-eyes like port-lights, and yet others with stars and circles of electric bulbs.

At the distant end of the long, light, shining room, the deck-like run of the polished boards was broken by a step leading to a platform where the rigidly-erect figures of three men in dark blue uniform sat at the middle, and at either end of a long narrow table burdened with instruments whose use Bawne partly knew. The midmost operator, sitting with his back to you, wore a head-band with receiver ear-pieces, beyond which his ears, large, thick, and red as quarter-pounds of beefsteak, projected in a singularly grotesque way. The man seated on the right of the table had a paper-pad and pencil, and the man on the left sat in front of a typewriter, with lowered intent eyes and fingers crooked above the keys, as one waiting to type off a Wireless message, and the tingling desire to approach and see the apparatus more closely evoked a wiggle on the part of the boy that was grimly checked by a big hard hand that gripped his arm. This reminded him that he was a prisoner. Like von Herrnung, Bawne thought and—then upon his right he became aware of von Herrnung, green as a drowned man—and with all the stiffening gone out of him—wilting over the supporting arms of two officers of the garrison. And then a voice said something shrilly and harshly—and Saxham's son found himself looking into a pair of steel-blue, shining, flickering eyes, with whites curiously veined with red.

The man to whom the eyes belonged sat immediately facing you, on the opposite side of a big kneehole writing-table with rows of drawers in its pedestals, and official-looking ledgers upon it, also files of papers, dispatch-cases, three big inkstands, and the shining metal pillar of a telephone transmitter, the base of which the officer gripped with his right hand as he leaned forwards, sharply scrutinising

you. The hand was large and muscular, with short, thick, crooked fingers, covered with jewelled rings that sparkled in the sun.

Half a dozen other officers stood at some little distance behind the seated personage. . . . Five out of the six wore the Service dress of grey-green serge, with spiked helmets covered with the same material. Badges, buckles, chain-straps, and the hilts of swords curved or straight were dulled to rigorous uniformity, and belts, gloves, and boots were of earth, not tan-coloured, brown. Thus much Bawne grasped, but of these individualities, save one, he got no clear impression. You were obliged to look at, and think of, the man sitting in the chair.

Those strange eyes stung as they fastened on you and sucked at you, somehow making you think of a tiger lurking in a cave of ice. They were shadowed by the peak of a grey-green field-cap, with an edge of vivid crimson showing above its deep band of silver lace, oakleaf and acorn-patterned. He wore a loose grey overcoat with silver buttons, thrown open to reveal a grey-green single-breasted Service jacket with a turn-down collar edged with silver lace and faced with crimson, and a glittering decoration dangling below the hook. But as he was of the short-necked, fleshy type of man, and kept his head well down and thrust forward, staring you out of countenance over a grizzled moustache with upright, bushy ends—and all the light in the room came from overhead, the decoration was obscured by the shadow of his chin. A sharp chin, meagrely modelled, with a cleft in the middle, suggesting petulance and vanity. The chin of a mediocre actor of romantic parts.

"So you are the boy?"

The tobacco-stained teeth in the mouth under the dyed moustache were filled and patched with gold that glittered when he spoke to you. There was a flash of yellow metal now as he added:

"You do not answer, no? Come nearer, boy!"

His legs, short, thick legs in grey riding-breeches and brown boots with beautiful spurs of gold and steel, stuck out towards you under the table. As you stepped out briskly to lessen the distance between you, he pulled the legs back sharply, and a handsome, dark young officer, standing on his right, put out a brown-gloved hand warningly, as though the border of the big Turkey rug on which stood the kneehole writing-table were a frontier-line that must not be crossed.

As he did this, the seated man glanced round at him, nodding approval, and the pale, jagged seam of a scar on his left cheek showed plainly against the dark, harsh, fever-dry skin. With the slewing of his head the decoration hanging by a swivel at the collar of his single-breasted Service jacket flashed into the light. Bawne saw a large Maltese Cross eight-pointed and blue-enamelled, having a black eagle, with outspread wings, between each arm. Crossed swords in diamonds were above, surmounted by a diamond Crown Imperial. And a black and white ribbon supported another Cross of plain black edged with silver, at a buttonhole of the Norfolk-cut jacket of grey-green. Possibly the boy had guessed in whose presence he stood, even before the young officer, at an impatient signal from his master, said in excellent English:

"I am commanded to tell you that you are in the presence of the Emperor of Germany."

## CHAPTER XLVIII

### PATRINE IS ENGAGED

"Don't tell me—not that you ever have—that there ain't such a thing as Providence!" Thus Franky, after lunch upon the fateful Third of August, from the hearthrug of the drawing room at 00, Cadogan Place. "When," he went on, "just as I'm on the point of sendin' in my papers to please you—good old England kerwumps into War!"

He continued, as Margot shrugged her small shoulders:

"All right, best child! Bet you twenty to one in gloves it comes off!—as sure as the Austrian monitors were shellin' Belgrade, and the British Cabinet were sittin' on Sunday, and the weekly rags selling like hot cakes, when you and me and the rest of the congregation were slowly oozin' out of Church. Why, the Kaiser and the Tsar have been at loggerheads since Saturday. German troops are swampin' Luxembourg, and the next move will be the Invasion of France. There We come in—and the rest of the big European Powers! Like a row of beehives kicked over!—all the swarms mixed and stingin', and Kittums' little Franky in the middle of the scrum!"

"Why are you so—frightfully keen about it?"

Margot's great dark deer-eyes were vaguely troubled. She got up from her writing-table, a lovely thing in Russian tulip-tree, the shelf of which was graced by a row of mascots: Ti-Ti and the jade tree-frog, Jollikins, Gojo, and half a dozen more.

"Best child, I'm not keen!" asserted Franky. "But I'm pattin' myself on the back—gloatin' over the knowledge that I'm not a bally Has Been—but a real live soldier—just when I'm likely to be wanted to be one! Switch on?"

He added, as Margot shook her head: "My grammar's a bit off, but I know what I mean if I can't express it. Here's a telegraph-kid on a red spider. Two to one in cough-drops that yellow screed's for me! Callin' me to Headquarters just as I'd got into my civvy rags to spend the afternoon with my wife!"

The prophecy proved correct. Franky vanished upstairs to peel, plunge into his Guards' uniform, and whirl away, borne by a taxi, into the dim conjectural regions known as Headquarters.

Margot went back to her desk to re-read a type-written letter from the Secretary of the Krauss and Wolfenbüchel Frauenklinik at Berlin, counselling the honoured English lady whose introduction, supplied by a former lady-client, was specially satisfactory!—to secure a room at the Institute, by the payment of a moiety of the fee in advance. The crowd of applicants desirous to subject themselves to the wonderful "Purple Dreams" treatment, was so large, the accommodation, by comparison, so restricted, that to follow this course would be the only wise plan. Similar treatment could be obtained in Paris and Brussels, but to ensure success beyond doubt it was wisest to seek it at the German fountainhead. One hundred guineas would secure admission to the Berlin Frauenklinik. By cheque made payable to the British Agent of Professors Krauss and Wolfenbüchel, Mr. Otto Busch, ooo, Cornhill, London, E.C. It would be advisable were the English client to follow her remittance, taking up residence in Berlin within the next few days. Travelling might not be so easy in October, mildly hinted the Secretary of the Institute.

Why, bosh! what utter piffle! Good old England wasn't going to toddle into any European War in a hurry, decided Margot. She had had enough bother over the South African biz. Perhaps if Germany was having a rag with Russia, and a tiny bit of a scrap with France, one would have to get a passport, and travel by a different route to

Berlin. Perhaps the best thing would be to go now—and stick the boredom of a three months' residence in the Kaiser's capital! Why not? Under the existing circumstances, one would be bored anywhere.

She drew the cheque, and enclosed it to Mr. Busch's address, and wrote a little letter in a huge hand to the Secretary, saying that she had done this and was obliged by his advice. Then she 'phoned to the Club to ask Patrine to come round to tea at 00, Cadogan Place. Miss Saxham was not there, according to the hall-porter, but might be found at AA, Harley Street. There Margot ran her to earth. Yes, Pat would come with pleasure! but upon condition that Lady Norwater was alone.

"Of course!" Margot remembered. "She's in mourning for the pretty kiddy-cousin! I must be getting stupid, or I'd have thought of that!"

But when the tall figure passed under the Persian portière of the Cadogan Place drawing-room, it was arrayed in a revealing gown of pale rose lisse with the well-known stole of black feathers and a tall-crowned hat of golden braiding topped the Nile sunrise hair.

"Why, I thought—" Margot began:

"I know! Do you think it horribly unfeeling?" The speaker stooped to kiss the soft cheek of the little creature curled up in the corner of a favourite sofa in a favourite attitude which conveyed an impression of Margot's having no feet. Patrine did not look at all horrid or unfeeling as she said, winking back the tears that had overbrimmed her underlids, "My heart is in crape if my body isn't!"

"I know!" Margot's lovely eyes looked sympathy. "I remember how fond you've always been of the little cousin."

"Uncle Owen and Lynette won't believe that the darling's drowned," Patrine went on. "But I can't hope! I'm not of the hoping kind! When I shut my eyes I seem to see

Bawne fighting to keep afloat—then sinking. It's as though he called me, and—it's horrible!" She shuddered. "It's horrible!"

"And—Count von Herrnung? The German Flying Man?" Margot touched the large white hand next her. "You know what a bad hand I am at saying things that are consolatory and cosy. Couldn't rake up a single text for my life—or if I did I'd quote 'em wrong end topside. Like the callow curate who assured the weeping widow that 'Heaven tempers the wind to the lorn sham!'"

"I'll let you off the texts, not being a weeping widow!"

But Patrine's pale cheeks burned. Margot pursued, not looking at them:

"Rhona Helvellyn told me there was nothing serious between you. Indeed, she said you rather hated him than otherwise. But of course you're sorry he's drowned, naturally!"

There was a silence. Then:

"Yes," Patrine agreed, "I rather hated him than otherwise!"

"Ah!" Margot's little face was sage. "It's a pity you don't care for some nice man or other!"

"Isn't it?"

"But you will one day. It's much nicer to live with your husband than with your sister. Though I never had a sister," added Margot. Then her mind, light and brilliant as a humming-bird, flitted to another subject. "Rhona and her two Militants lunched with me on Sunday. Awfully down on their luck, all three. The Grand Slam they'd planned—the surprise-packet for the Mansion House Banquet had had the lid put on it by the Police. Fancy Scotland Yard finding out anything! But it had, for Rhona got a mysterious note warning her that she'd be dropped on before she could open her head. So—the Bishops toddled through their speeches without being interrupted! Sit down and light up. These Balkan Sobranies are tophole!"

"I can't stay!" But Patrine sat down on the sofa, dipped in the ever-brimful silver box, and kindled a cigarette.

"Where's His Nibs?" she asked. For not even the chastening of bereavement could cure Patrine of slanginess.

"Called to B.P.G. Headquarters suddenly." Margot blew rings. "Or doing duty for some pal or other at the Tower. Don't bother about him! Tell me—why can't you stay with me?"

"Aunt Lynette wants me, for one thing. And——"

"And who for the other?"

"A man!" Patrine sent a thin blue spiral of cigarette smoke twirling upwards from her pursed lips. Intently she watched it climbing and spreading. When it faded between her absorbed eyes and the Futurist mouldings of the lapis lazuli-grounded ceiling whereon a silver comet swung in a great elliptical orbit about a golden central Sun, she resumed:

"A man——"

"That makes two men!" said Margot shrewdly,

"No, only one. A man I'm going to marry. Rather soon, too," said Patrine calmly, and put her cigarette into her mouth again.

"Pat!"

Margot was staring at her blankly.

"Well, my dinkie?"

"Isn't this frightfully previous?"

Patrine removed the cigarette to say:

"It depends on how you look at things."

"But—when did you meet?"

"In Paris."

"Do I know him?"

"No, luckily for me!"

Margot's small, amazed face dimpled a little at the compliment.

"Is he nice?"

"I think so!"

"In Our Set?"

"I don't think so! He's a Flying Man by profession. Now you know nearly as much as I do," said Patrine. "And I've to be getting back to Harley Street." She rose from the sofa, towering over her small, indignant friend.

"You're not going out of this room until you tell me the rest of it! What is his name, and when did—it—come off?"

"His name is Alan—and he only asked me on Wednesday, when he came to Harley Street. He has called every day since that horrible 18th of July, but this time he came to bring"—Patrine choked a little—"Bawne's Scout staff and smasher. They had been forgotten in the dressing-shed at the Flying School. Lynette was too ill to go down to receive them. I had to instead—and the sight of them broke me up."

"I—see!"

"And," Patrine went on, "he—Alan—was being sympathetic, when Uncle Owen came in."

"My hat!" Margot sat up, her small face alight and sparkling. "The Doctor-man with the chin and eyebrows! Did he give you unlimited wigging or relent and bless you like the heavy uncle in a proper French Comedy?"

"He saw how things were between us. He wasn't astonished. He was very kind. He is always kind!" said Patrine, swallowing. "If I really believed God were as good as Uncle Owen, I shouldn't be afraid to die."

"He makes me feel like an earwig under a steam-roller," affirmed Margot. "And the charming aunt. Does she cotton to the engagement?"

"Lynette is not, for the present, to be told. I asked that. It seems so cruel to be happy when she is so broken-hearted."

"Umps! Then—Irma and your gay and giddy mater? How do they take it?"

"They haven't been asked to take it any way."

"Oh well! Love is good while it lasts," Kittums said

from the summit of a pedestal of experience, "but if I could change back to Margot St. John again——"

"You wouldn't!"

"Wouldn't I, that's all! This horror that November brings—that's coming every day closer! . . . Pat—I haven't told Franky yet, that's to be got over! But I've definitely settled to go to that Institute in Berlin where women can have babies without knowing anything about it—under— Bother! I never can remember the name of that drug!"

Patrine sat up. Her face was curiously expressionless. She said, crushing out the last spark of her cigarette-end against the face of a Chinaman on the lacquer ash-tray that occupied a little stand beside the sofa with the silver Sobranie box:

"You told me something—you showed me the pink book with the pretty title, 'WEEP NO MORE MOTHERS'—wasn't that the name? You've made up your mind? Does it cost the earth?"

"Two hundred for patients of the superior class—*wohlgeboren* clients. Half paid in advance! Stiff!—but to make sure of not suffering I'd plank a thou'! It's a nightmare, and a Day-mare, that haunts me all the clock round. That's why I'd change—and be Margot St. John again! That's why I can't whoop with joy when my friends tell me they're going to be spliced!"

Patrine got up.

"Oh!—well! Perhaps I shall escape. After all—it's a lottery!"

"Not for big, splendid women like you. You were made to be a mother, Pat!"

"*Don't!*"

She kissed Margot hastily and went to the door.

"Stop!" Margot scrambled off the sofa. "You've forgotten the most important thing of all. Hasn't 'Alan' got a surname by any chance?"

Patrine looked back over her shoulder with something of the old smile.

"Rather! What do you think of Sherbrand?"

"What do I think of Sherbrand? How odd! It's Franky's family name!"

"Queer coincidence. But *my* Sherbrand hasn't any relatives in the Peerage!—or if he has, he hasn't told me! I'll butt you wise when I know him well enough to ask him about them. You see, the whole thing has been beautifully sudden!"

"Bring him to lunch at the Club to-morrow. You're not in mourning, and if you were it wouldn't matter. It's simply a family affair, if he's really Franky's cousin. So, say yes."

"Very well, if he'll come!"

## CHAPTER XLIX

### THE WAR CLOUD BREAKS

PATRINE kissed her friend again, and went, leaving Kittums in a whirl of astonishment. To Franky, presently returning from the conjectural region known as Headquarters she announced:

"Here's something like news! Pat Saxham—the girl with the Nile sunrise hair that you don't like!—is going to marry a Flying Man. And his name is—the same as yours!"

"By the Great Snipe! you don't say so!"

Franky, slim and dapper in the scarlet Guards' tunic and crimson sash, divested himself of his sword, dropped his immaculate buckskin gloves into his forage-cap, and sighed with undisguised relief as the attentive Jobling, who had been hovering in the background, disappeared with these articles. Then he proceeded carefully to choose a cigarette from the silver box of Sobranies, lighted it up, bundled Fits out of her master's corner of the sofa, and dropped into it with a sigh of relief.

"Sherbrand. . . . Must be the aviator-fellow we met in Paris. The chap whose hoverer was bein' tested by the swells of the French S. Aë! Saved your life and snubbed me for askin' him to dine with us! Well, that's what I call a cannon off the cush for the Saxham girl!" His dislike of her betrayed itself in his tone. "Must be the same man! supposin' him short of a father! Hilton of Ours showed me an advertisement in the B.M.D. column of *The Banner* this afternoon briefly announcin' my Uncle Sherbrand's death. Never read *The Banner*—that's how I missed it. Can't say I feel much like puttin' crape on my sleeve in any quantity,"

went on Franky. "My Uncle Noel has been the Family Skeleton, poor old chap! since that affair in 1900. No doubt his son's cut up—wouldn't be decent of him not to! But at any rate it brings him nearer these—" Franky stuck out a beautifully-cut pair of red-striped auxiliaries ending in dazzling patent-leather Number Eights, and craning over Fits, who had jumped upon his knees, regarded them critically, ending after a pause—"By one life out of the three that stand between. Don't be so gushin', old girl!" The rebuke was for Fits, who had taken advantage of her master's attitude to lick him on the chin.

Margot crinkled her slender eyebrows and moved restlessly among her big bright, muslin-covered cushions as she asked:

"Is this Volapuk or Esperanto? For mercy's sake don't be obscure! Why is this Flying Sherbrand nearer your shoes by one life out of three? What has he got to do with your shoes at all?"

"Don't you switch on?" He lifted his sleek brown head and turned his neck in the setting of the gold-encrusted collar badged with the Scottish Thistle, and stared at Margot with the brown eyes that had seemed so beautiful under the awnings of the Nile *dahabeyah*, and were only stupid now.

"Have you forgotten? Don't you twig, best child? Suppose—for the joke of it—there's War, and I get wiped out tryin' to keep up the fightin' traditions of my family and get a bit of gun-metal to hang on a ribbon here." He glanced down at the left breast of the red coat, guiltless of anything in the decoration line. "Then—unless the child"—his tone grew gentle—"our kiddy that's coming, happens to be a boy—my Cousin Sherbrand steps into my billet. He's the next heir to the Norwater Viscounty. Look in Burke or Whittaker if you don't believe me! Get down, old lady, you're coverin' me with white hairs!" He bundled Fits off his knees, got up and rang. "A man ought to be

here from Armer's," he told the servant who responded. "Armer and Co., Pall Mall, Military Tailors. Send him up to my room and tell Jobling to help him with all those cases and things. No! don't send Jobling!—send Dowd!"

The said Dowd being Franky's soldier servant, between whom and the civilian Jobling reigned a profound mutual contempt.

"What is Dowd going to do?"

"Oh! only goin' to help overhaul my Service kit and so on," Franky responded lightly. "What with gettin' leave and bein' married I've hardly sported kharks since last Autumn Slogs. Wouldn't do to find myself too potty to get into the regulation tea-leaves in case my country called."

"What rot! . . ."

But Franky had swung out of the room and clattered upstairs with Fits close upon his heels. Fits, who, ordinarily unwilling to be out of sight and sound of her master, now adhered to him like a leech, or his shadow; whining and fidgeting in his absence, as though her feminine mind were beset by haunting apprehensions of some sudden parting, or impending loss. . . . Long afterwards Margot wondered:

"If I had loved him as Fits loves him—should I not also have felt that foreshadowing dread?"

But she was conscious only of her own physical discomfort and the increasing weariness that movement brought her. Sharp discontent peaked and pinched the tiny features. She caught a reflection of them in a screen-mirror and shuddered. With every day that dawned now, their wild-rose prettiness faded. By-and-by—

"If I were as good to look at as I used to be in June—or even a month ago!" she wondered—"would *he* leave me as he is leaving me to-night—to go down to the House? Don't I know that the House means the Club, or the music-hall, or a card-party! Why do men get the best of everything and never have to pay the bill?"

She dined in a tea-gown, and when Franky, still in that

strange mood of suppressed excitement, attired to four pins in the magpie evening garb of civilized life, had kissed her and said: "So-long, Kittums, little woman! I'm going down to the Big Talk Shop for a bit. Expect me back on the doormat when the Mouthpieces of the Nation have done swoppin' hot air!" she tucked up her feet on the big sofa in her charming drawing-room and read "WEEP NO MORE, MOTHERS," until the pink pamphlet with the gilt sunrise stamped upon it grew heavy in the tiny hand. Then she rang for Pauline and betook herself to bed.

The bedroom was blue-green as a starling's egg, its painted walls adorned with delicate lines of black and silver. Perhaps you can see Kittums, under her Brittany lace coverlet amongst the big frilled pillows in one of the narrow black oak bedsteads standing side by side on a carpet of deep rose. A silver night-lamp burned under a dome of sapphire glass on her night-table, and an electric clock noiselessly marked the hours. Lying thus, wrapped about with all the swaddlings of Civilisation, this dainty daughter of the Twentieth Century strove in blind revolt against Nature, the huge relentless Force that was slowly grinding her down. The ant that gets fed into the mill-hopper with the grain might resent the millstone after the same fashion. Ridiculous, but infinitely pathetic, the tragedy of an infinitesimal thing.

What did Franky comprehend of her terrors, her forebodings? Even Saxham's counsels were a man's counsels, his advice a man's advice. "*Face your ordeal! do not flee it, lest you encounter something even more terrible!*" Not more terrible for oneself, mind you! but for that unknown, conjectural being, referred to by Franky with such foolish tenderness.

The child always! Never Margot! She set her little teeth, staring out into the blue-green dusk from among her pillows. What if it were to be always so? "My boy," "My son," for ever, instead of "My wife."

It was a breathless night. A hush of suspense brooded over the huge, hot city, such as prevails before the breaking of a storm. Sentences from the Secretary's letter came back to her as she tossed under the cool light coverings:

"*Wiser not to delay, lest travelling should become difficult. It will be advisable indeed for the gracious lady to start as soon as may be. English bank-notes are negotiable here to some extent. A sum in gold is most convenient to bring.*"

Why hang back? Why hesitate because one expected opposition from Franky? Why not slip off on the quiet without a hint to him? What a perfectly tophole idea! One could pack secretly, get funds from one's Bank, and skip with Pauline *via* Ostend to-morrow! Berlin was a dull place, but anyhow one had got to be dull for some months yet. The thing could be arranged while Franky was absent on duty at the Tower, or on one of his mysterious errands to Headquarters. One could cable to him afterwards from the *Frauenklinik* at Berlin.

An electrical thrill of energy and purpose volted through the humming-bird brain under the silken brown waves. Margot tossed back her coverings and sat up suddenly in bed. Her great eyes gleamed like a lemur's in the light of the night-globe. She would steal that march on Franky, she told herself, to-morrow, or at the latest, the day after. Wouldn't it be A1?

The small face dimpled into mischievous smiles. She caught a glimpse of it in a mirror on the opposite wall and kissed her little hand to Margot with saucy gaiety. If Franky, down at Westminster, could only know what Kittums was planning! She had a vision of the Houses of Parliament under the white-hot August moonlight, outlined in bluish-green and dazzling silver against a background of glittering black. Like a Limoges enamel, she told herself. The long lines of electric arc-lights stretching over the bridge, up Whitehall and down Victoria Street—all along the Thames Embankment—strings of diamonds—

crowds and crowds of people . . . talking bosh about War when there wouldn't——She was asleep.

Asleep, while packed thousands waited under the blue glare of the arc-lights for the rising of the Curtain on the World Tragedy, of which four yearlong Acts have been played out. For the tag of which Humanity is waiting with held breath, too weary even to cry out: "*How long, O Lord?—how long?*"

Prone to assume strange, angular attitudes when speaking, the Foreign Secretary hung over and clutched at the dispatch-box before him, as though it literally contained that most malignant of all the swarm of Evils that issued from the Box of Pandora, as he told his hearers of the rejection of the German bribe and warned them of the imminence of a Declaration of War. Then, amidst increasing, deepening excitement, the Prime Minister read the appeal of the King of the Belgians, and told of Great Britain's ultimatum to Germany. . . .

No wonder those close-packed crowds of sturdy Britons waited under the blue glare of the arc-lamps to hear Big Ben bell the midnight hour. As the great voice boomed Twelve from the illuminated square of the dial amidst the striking of the countless clocks of London, a tremendous roar of cheers acclaimed the pipping of the egg of Fate and Destiny, echoed by other crowds in distant thoroughfares, spreading in waves to the unseen horizon, whose East was pregnant with the Kaiser's Day.

That Fourth of August; Eve of the Feast of British Oswald, King, soldier and Saint, whose Address to his Northumbrian warriors before the battle of Denisburn, fought against Pagan Cadwalla in 633, the Catholic Church enshrines in Her Chronicles:

"*Let us all kneel and jointly beseech the true and living GOD ALMIGHTY in His Mercy to defend us from the*

*doughty and fierce enemy. For He knoweth that we have undertaken a just War. . . .*"

"Whereupon," says the Venerable Bede, "all did as the King commanded. And advancing towards the enemy with the first dawn of day, they won the victory their Faith deserved."

And before midnight of this pregnant Fourth of August, from the great Wireless Station of Eilvise in Hanover, Germany flung round the world this vital message to all her mercantile Marine:

"War declared on England! Make as quickly as you can for a neutral port!"

On the outbreak of War the British Navy cut the All German cables. One by one the German Colonial Wireless Stations were dismantled. When the great station at Kamina in Togoland fell, the only remaining link in the system was between the Fatherland and the United States.

Dawn outlining the silken blinds, vied with the blue glimmer of the night-lamp as Margot wakened, to hear, in the hush that precedes the Brocken-hunt of Sloane Street motor-traffic, Franky's low, urgent appeal:

"*Kittums!* Kittums, best child!"

"What on earth did you wake me for?" said a sleepy and distinctly cross voice.

"Couldn't help it! I simply had to tell you!" Franky began.

The little hand touched the electric clock-button and on the ceiling wavered a gigantic dial of yellow brightness.

"*Had* to! At three o'clock in the morning! When I was having such a tophole dream! Thought I was back at the Club in my three dear rooms with the Adams doors and chimney-pieces—and Pauline came in with a huge basket of white flowers—and I asked: '*Who are they for?*' And she said: 'For Mademoiselle!' And I was Margot St. John—

and had never been married!" There was infinite wistfulness in the little voice.

"White flowers mean death, don't they, when you dream of 'em? And I'm sorry your dip in the Bran Tub of Matrimony has turned out such a bad investment. What I came to tell you should revive your hopes of making a better one, my child!"

That jarring note of mingled resentment and irony, how new and strange it sounded to Margot! Until this moment Franky's voice had never been anything but gentle. It was gentle now as he said, at his dressing-room door:

"Finish your sleep. I was rather a brute to wake you!" He was going without a backward glance.

"Come back! Come off it! Don't be dignified!" Margot called after the retreating figure. "I'm quite awake now, so you'd better tell. What's on?"

He came back to the bedside, looking tall and shadowy in the blue dimness. Margot put up a little hand and patted his cheek. There were wet drops upon the smooth, warm skin. . . . Perhaps he had walked home, and it had been raining. Or—

"*Franky!* You're not——"

He captured the little hand and took it in both his own, and squeezed it. He said in a cheerful but rather choky voice:

"Of course not! And—the news could have waited. Only—since midnight England and Germany have been at War. The Big Scrap is three hours old. First battalion of Ours is under orders for the Front—I've exchanged out of the Second with Ackroyd—too sick a man for fightin' just now, luckily for me. You know Ackroyd. Used to flirt with him frightfully—to give me beans when I'd vexed you when we were first engaged. When do we go, did you ask? Liable to be off at any old minute. By-bye, little woman. Too late to go to bed—heaps of things to attend to. God bless you! See you at brekker—or lunch, if I've luck."

## CHAPTER L

### THE EVE OF ARMAGEDDON

KITTUMS, upon that fateful morning, coming down to breakfast and finding no Franky, was annoyed. One might just as well have had breakfast in bed. She didn't want any, but Cook would be hurt if the chowder and eggs, and croquettes of chicken weren't eaten. Therefore Margot ate—to avoid wounding the cook. The daily papers she left untouched, knowing that War would leap out from the huge capitals heading the columns and strike her in the eyes.

She had herself dressed and 'phoned for the car. The house did not seem a place to stay in, somehow. Dowd was busy in his master's room, ordering Jobling about in loud authoritative tones and being waited upon by the maids. Even Pauline, ordinarily scornful, referred to him as "Monsieur Dowd" instead of "*zat man Dow!*"

Once in Sloane Street, the War rushed at you. Groups of men, young, old or middle-aged, stood talking at every street-corner, newspapers rustled in every hand. You couldn't escape the papers. Huge flaring headlines shrieked from the broad-sheets in the gutters and on the railings: "WAR DECLARED! ULTIMATUM EXPIRED. BRITISH FLEET READY FOR BATTLE. INVASION OF BELGIUM BY GERMAN ARMY CORPS!" The drapery salesman who was to win the Victoria Cross, called from the top of a Knightsbridge motor-bus to the grocer's assistant who was to receive the Médaille Militaire at the doughty hands of Joffre. . . . The budding airman who was to bring down a Zeppelin single-handed chuffed past on a motor-cycle—the girls who were to make shells for British guns, or pack made ones with T.N.T. and kindred explosives, tripped along in their

transparent hobble-skirts, to meet Alf and Ted at the Tube. And neither Alf, who subsequently took five Huns prisoner by the single hand, shepherding them back to the British lines with dunts of the gun-butt and sarcasms more pointed, nor Ted, who threw himself down over the exploding bomb, dying that his comrades in the trench might live, dreamed what kind of chick would pip Fate's egg for him or her presently. Yet the dullest face wore a new expression, in the tamest eyes burned the light of battle! Unquenched it burns in them still, after four dreadful years of War.

The Club, already deserted by August holiday-makers, would be utterly abandoned to chimney-sweeps, charwomen and window-cleaners, and yet Margot told the chauffeur to drive to the Club.

Turning out of Piccadilly she discovered Short Street to be blocked by taxi-cabs. An endless procession of telegraph-boys plunged in and out between the thudding swing-doors of the vestibule. The vestibule was congested with battered, dusty ladies, ladies' maids even dustier and more battered, and travelling bags battered and dusty to the *nth* degree.

Some of the bags were bursting, not a few of the maids were hysterical. All the returned travellers were telling their adventures at once. The air was thick with exclamations, explanations, cries and ejaculations. Unfed, unslept, baggageless and penniless in many instances, the members of the Ladies' Social—seeking health, or novelty, in half the pleasure-resorts upon the map of Europe—had come hurtling back to Short Street like leaves driven before the furious blast of War.

"Has anything happened?"

Lady Norwater addressed this query to the Club hall-porter, a bald person of habitually slow movements and singularly bland address. The man gnashed his teeth at her, uttering a sound between a groan and a snarl—made as though to tear non-existent hair,—leaped with astonishing

nimbleness over a pile of luggage, and vanished. Margot would have made a note of his conduct in the Complaints register, but that the hall-table was obliterated by heaps of rugs, dust-cloaks and waterproofs. Wondering, she made her way into the big General Room on the ground-floor.

Here travel-creased, dust-smeared members sat in voluble rows on the comfortable sofas, or reclined speechless in the capacious armchairs. Medical men, hastily summoned by 'phone, moved noiselessly from patient to patient. Husbands and male friends listened not unmoved, to piteous recitals of adverse experiences undergone on enemy ground.

Kittums, snatched into the whirl, moved from friend to friend, gathering experiences. Mrs. Charterhouse, with her Pekinese pug and her maid, had just arrived at Homburg to undergo treatment for a twenty-two-inch waist when the War Cloud gathered monstrous on the horizon. Had not her Swiss doctor written a warning instead of a prescription the white and golden Cynthia, Mademoiselle Mariette and Chin-Chin, would at this moment have been languishing on rye bread and bean coffee in a Teutonic jail.

"As it is, we've spent a whole week, and every sou we had on us making the journey!" said Cynthia, in her plaintive tones. "They held us up at Frankfurt, Basel, and Geneva! What inquisitions, what scowling suspicious looks! To be hunted and suspect *makes* you wicked, I've found out! When we got to Paris at four yesterday morning and took a rickety *fiacre* to the Palais—all the taxis have vanished!—I could have *prayed* for a cup of tea and a roll! But at the Palais all was confusion. The hotel was shutting up—every male servant called to the Reserve. We got to the 'Spitz'—the same experience there! Exhausted, I sat on something in the vestibule—it moved, groaned, and I found it to be the wreck of Sir Thomas Brayham. He and Lady Wathe, his man and her maid, who have been all through July at Franzenbad in the Egerland,—reaching Paris after awful adventures, had all four been hurled out in the same way.

One of those jiggety motor-omnibuses took all of us to the Couronne. They were full to the roofs and cellars, but they wedged us in, somehow! Then, for two days Sir Thomas tore round Paris trying to get *laissez-passers.*" She turned her lovely eyes upon a large, stertorously-breathing but otherwise inert object reclining with closed eyes and folded hands in the biggest of the Club armchairs. "Didn't you, Sir Thomas?"

"Beparr?"

Brayham, waking with a bewildered stare, regarded the charming Cynthia uncomprehendingly until the Goblin, sitting opposite, centre of a knot of bosom friends, repeated the query:

"Didn't you run about Paris for passes for two days?"

"No!" bounced out Brayham, now aroused, and purpling under the coal-dust that begrimed his large, judicial visage. He added, with a vestige of his King's Bench manner, as the Goblin stared at him in concern for his mental state: "I retain the use of my reason, dear friend! But I WILL NOT consent that the varied tortures of the abominable ordeal I have undergone could possibly be packed within the nut-shell limits of forty-eight hours! Mph!"

So dust-covered was the ex-Justice that the very act of shaking his head rebukingly at the Goblin, raised a cloud that made him sneeze. He uttered the curious composite sound that heralds sternutation, drew out a voluminous, coal-dusty handkerchief, stared at it indignantly, and in the very act of returning it to his pocket—fell asleep again.

"A perfect wreck, as I said just now!" whispered Mrs. Charterhouse to Kittums.

"*How* I congratulate you, dear Lady Wastwood," said the Goblin, "on not having gone abroad!"

"Was it so horrid?" asked Trixie, sympathetically, arching the eyebrows that resembled musical slurs.

"Was it so—" Lady Wathe shrugged her thin shoulders and gave the ghost of one of her rattling laughs. "If to

fight your way back, stage by stage, amidst inconceivable difficulties, obstacles and insults, is horrid!—if to travel for two long days and nights in trains crowded to suffocating excess merits the term—" She loosened the quadruple string of superb Oriental pearls that tightly clipped her stalk-like throat and went on: "If it comes under the heading to find yourself and your friends—in tatters after a suffocating struggle!—packed with sixty other squalid wretches in a luggage-van *en route* for Dieppe! If to sit for three hours on your jewel-case, waiting, in a crush of congested humanity, for the arrival of the Newhaven boat—if to fight as with beasts at Ephesus to gain its gangway—if to fall in a heap on the sodden deck—to lie there lost to everything but the fact that the waves that drench you are British waves, and the British coast is slowly crawling nearer!—if all this and how much more, can be lumped under the term of horrid, it has been, dear Lady Wastwood, horrid in the extreme!"

Lady Wastwood's small, triangular, white face with the V-shaped scarlet mouth, looked enigmatical. She arched the thick black slurs that were her eyebrows again, and said not without intent, to her crony Cynthia Charterhouse:

"*Who* would have *dreamed* only three weeks ago, when that excessively long-legged and extremely good-looking Count von Herrnung sat here and talked to us about German women and German Supermen—that we should be at War to-day with Germany?"

"Poor Count Tido!" Something rattled in the Goblin's meagre throat as though she had accidentally swallowed some of her pearls. "That dreadful report in *The Wire* made the Franzenbad treatment disagree with me horribly! To be drowned in that commonplace North Sea crossing, upon the very eve of realising the one ambition of his life! For he hated us so thoroughly! His Anglophobia was a perfect obsession. Poor dear Tido! One might call it a wasted career!" The speaker dried a tear and

continued: "His family will be frantic. You know he was to have been married in October! Baroness Kriemhilde von Wolfensbragen-Hirschenbuttel. Immensely rich! Her father has large interests in the pearl-fisheries of German New Guinea. Her betrothal gift, a superb black and white pearl, the Count always wore as a mascot. Poor Baroness! She will be inconsolable. Marriage means the first draught of real freedom to young German girls!"

Mrs. Charterhouse said in her sweetly venomous way:

"Miss Saxham bears up—under the circumstances!"

"Under what circumstances, might one presume to ask?" Then, reading aright the ambiguous smile of Mrs. Charterhouse, the Goblin rattled out her characteristic laugh:

"What absurdity! You refer to a mere dinner-table flirtation in Paris. The mere *rapprochement* of *atomes crochus!* Miss Saxham and Lady Beauvayse dined with us on the night of the Grand Prix. Poor Tido was certainly struck with her. I remember he talked about her eyes and figure afterwards. But her hair being so black and growing so heavily—did not please him. He found the effect—I think his term was—'too crepuscular.'"

"Ah! You throw a ray," said Mrs. Charterhouse in that sugared way of hers, "on a mystery that has intrigued me. Now I know why Miss Saxham went to the Atelier Wiber in the Rue de la Paix and got her crepuscular tresses changed to terra-cotta!"

"*Not* saffron? Now," said Lady Wastwood, pensively tilting her own green-gold head and elevating her arched black eyebrows, "I should have called that shade saffron or tumeric. Who do you suppose footed the bill for the process? The wretch Wiber simply won't *look* at you under four hundred and fifty francs!"

"Perhaps Vivie Beauvayse—" suggested Mrs. Charterhouse.

"I think not. Vivie preferred the crepuscular effect. It contrasted capitally with her own style of colouring. You

must have noticed, they are seldom seen going about together as they used. Dear Lady Wathe, do you feel faint? Can I get you anything?"

For something had clicked behind the Goblin's pearls, and she had suddenly stiffened in her seat. The superb figure of Patrine Saxham had entered by the swing-doors leading from the vestibule followed by a tall, broad-shouldered young man in loose grey tweeds, whose left sleeve displayed a band of black significantly new.

"Can that be Miss Saxham? It must be!—her type is so unusual! Not having seen her since the night of the dinner I referred to I did not quite grasp the meaning of your references to ingredients common in Indian curries. Of course, I understand now!" The Goblin surveyed the tall, pliant figure with the dead beech-leaf hair through her lorgnette before she leaned forwards and roused the sleeping Brayham by a brisk application of the instrument. "Look, Sir Thomas! Would you have known Miss Saxham?"

"Beparr! . . . Wharr? . . . God bless my soul, no!" Brayham, turning in the armchair as the Zoo walrus turns in his concrete pond, surveyed Patrine with a bloodshot stare.

"Silly girl! Spoilt her looks!" he snorted. "Handsome as the dooce with her gipsy-black tresses. Won her bet. Won't get her ring now though, unless von Herrnung paid before he flew!"

"Was there a bet between them? How is it you never told me? Have I deserved this from you?" demanded Lady Wathe indignantly, as Mrs. Charterhouse and Lady Wastwood exchanged glances and smiles.

"Sorry! . . . Forgot! . . ." Brayham gobbled apologetically. "Man I know happened to be close to 'em leaving Spitz's Restaurant that Sunday night in Paris. Told me he heard von Herrnung lay Miss Saxham his magpie pearl solitaire against a bit o' Palais Royal paste she was wearing—that she wouldn't change the colour of her hair!

Made the appointment for her, with Wiber—'*Postiches Artistiques*,' and so on, *Rue de la Paix*. He bragged of it afterwards at the *Cercle Moderne!* Dam Germans! no idea of decency! Why do Englishwomen intrigue with 'em? Bounders that kiss and tell!"

There was a significant pause, broken by the Goblin's shrillest peal of laughter. The ex-Justice, whose vitality was low, folded his hands and dozed again. Then——

"Now we *know* who footed the bill," said Cynthia Charterhouse in dove-like accents. While Trixie murmured in the vexed ear of Margot:

"Kitts, my dinkie, you are a pal of the Saxhams. *How* far had the affair *really* gone?"

"There was no affair!" said Margot's sweet little voice, very clearly. "Pat rather hated Count von Herrnung than otherwise!"

"Judging by the mute evidence of her hair—" began Mrs. Charterhouse, languidly. How Margot loathed these women, erstwhile her chosen friends and associates, tearing with greedy beaks and vicious claws at the reputation of an unmarried girl. . . .

"Her hair belongs to her! She can bleach it if she wishes!" The little figure rose to its altitude of four feet seven inches and surveyed the scandalmongers with wrathful eyes. "I have said that there was nothing between Miss Saxham and Count von Herrnung"—the little voice was crystal-cold: "I should be extremely obliged to all of you if you will understand this clearly! Miss Saxham is engaged to my husband's cousin, Alan Sherbrand."—Had Franky heard that stately reference to my husband, he would have been "bowled," to quote himself. "Franky likes him, and so do I, tremendously! We're both keen on their bringing off the match!"

There was another resounding silence. Brayham snored melodiously. Then Trixie Wastwood said with her Pierrot smile:

"Really, Kitts, it was—hardly cricket not to have warned us!"

While Mrs. Charterhouse added in tones of iced velvet:

"Regard me also as prone beneath Miss Saxham's Number Eight shoes. Did you say her *fiancé* was a cousin of Lord Norwater's? Not possibly the son of the uncle who died quite recently? Captain the Hon. Noel Sherbrand, late of the Royal Gunners. . . . My husband used to know him before—people left off!"

"It is the same. He muddled his career somehow, and—most people cut him! But he is *dead*," said Margot very deliberately, "and his son, if we have no—" the delicate cheeks flushed with sudden vivid crimson—"his son is perfectly tophole and Franky's next heir. We met him in June in Paris, and so did Pat Saxham! How do any of you know she didn't tint her hair to please *him*."

"Possibly she did! But, according to Sir Thomas—it was the other man who paid!"

"Odd, isn't it? In this world," said the Goblin with her crackling laugh, "the other man invariably pays the bill! And so the young gentleman over there—who is quite remarkably good-looking in the blond Norman style—and who is going to marry Miss Saxham—succeeds to Lord Norwater in—a certain eventuality! May one be permitted to hope, dear Lady Norwater, that Fate and yourself will combine fortuitously, to keep the cousin out of the House of Peers!"

"Rude, ill-bred, horrid woman!" thought Margot, clenching her little teeth to keep back these epithets. "How dare she twit me with—*that!* How dare—" Then her hot flush sank away and a mist came before her eyes, and she would have fallen, but that Trixie Wastwood jumped up from the sofa and threw about the little figure a kind, supporting arm.

"I've got you! You're not going to faint, Kittums, are you? Forgive us, my dinkie! What *pigs* we have been!"

"Heckling the tomtit for defending the saffron-crested blackbird! I rather agree with you," admitted Mrs. Charterhouse as Margot freed herself, saying it was nothing, and proudly moved away. "We women are horribly spiteful," continued Cynthia. "Yes, we are spiteful, Lady Wathe! I am perfectly in earnest. What is the reason? Will anything cure us? Do somebody tell me! Colonel Charterhouse would say it is because we eat too much rich food, walk too little, automobile too much, and want some useful work or other to occupy our minds! He is coming here to lunch with me—he was quite touchingly anxious to be invited!" Her beautiful eyes widened as the swing-doors thudded behind three entering masculine figures, "Why, here he is with Lord Norwater, and your boy, Trixie! All three in khaki! What a day we are having!"

She added, as her handsome middle-aged Colonel made his spurred way through the ever-thickening crush to her:

"I am enlightened! So *this* was your surprise!"

"Not half as big as mine when I found they were willing to take me. 'Fit as a fiddle,' according to the M. O. Gad!"— he went on, as his wife made room for him on the settle by her side—"as willingly as though he had been somebody else's husband," Lady Wathe said subsequently—"It's to my golf I owe it—these A.M.S. sawbones finding me in the pink! And instead of a back-seat, what do you think they've given me? Command of the Third Reserve Battalion of the blessed old Regiment, the Loyal North Linkshires, *vice* Crowe-Pinckney, kicked out by a gouty toe! . . . How's that for an oldster of fifty-five, . . . Eh, what?" His chuckle was that of a Fourth Form athlete picked to supply a gap in the School Eleven. And Cynthia's beautiful eyes, as she slipped her hand into the Colonel's, looked at him as the boy's mother's might have looked upon her son.

Lady Wastwood's Pierrot smile might have played upon

the reunited couple mockingly, but that the unexpected apparition of her boy Wastwood in single-starred khaki, adorned with the badge of a crack Hussar Regiment, girt with the Sam Browne and narrow officer's shoulder-strap, and clad as to the legs in spurred brown butcher-boots—dimmed her bright green eyes and brought a choke into her throat. Wastwood the son was so like Wastwood the father—killed at Magersfontein in 1900,—whom Trixie, for no reason apparently, had romantically adored. A burly young man, pink as a baby, with thick fair hair growing down within two inches of his eyebrows, small, fierce blue eyes, and a huge roaring voice, softened down now to a tender bellow as he answered a pale girl's eager question with:

"Well, I can't say exactly when we're going to the Front, but I hope to Christmas it'll be soon!"

Wastwood's engagement to the girl had been announced only the week previously in the Society Columns of the leading dailies. Now, while Wastwood's younger brother Jerry anguished in the throes of a final Exam. at Sandhurst, the said Jerry being set upon getting a Commission in time to go to the Front with one of the First Divisions—his elder sat on a Club sofa and made love to the girl Jerry was subsequently to marry. For not only Wastwood's title, but his vacant Commission as a Lieutenant in the Dapple Greys and his sweetheart went to his junior after Mons.

There was a lot of family and regimental re-shuffling and re-dealing, you will remember, after Mons.

The leaven of the Great Awakening was working in the souls of these worldly-minded, ultra-modern men and women, even as the crowd in the rooms grew denser, as the buzz of talk became almost solid, and khaki mingled with the brilliant toilettes. Hardly a man but wore dead-leaf brown. Wives were entertaining their husbands, mothers were lunching their sons, that day, at the multitudinous little tables in the great and lesser dining-rooms,—there was

a revival of old code-words, an interchange of almost forgotten pet-names, a resurrection of ancient jokes, when the atmosphere seemed dangerously charged with emotion. How many Last Sacraments of renewed love were eaten and drunk by husbands and wives who, estranged for years, were to be reunited by the War, and parted by the War until the Day when Wars shall be no more.

That a tall young man in grey tweed with a crape armlet should sit opposite Patrine that day at Margot's special table was one of the thousand miracles already wrought.

Sherbrand had shelved all recollection of that June adventure in the Bois de Boulogne, when a flushed young husband in immaculate top-hat and frock-coat had thanked an angry young man in waterproof overalls and gabardine for not chopping his wife into kedgeree.

Could one be angry any more when this little human dragon-fly was what Patrine called "a frightful pal" of hers. Thank Heaven! Patrine had known nothing of the cousinship when she had answered Sherbrand's plain question, "Will you marry me?" with an assent:

"*Sooner than not!*"

"Then—it is settled?"

"Yes, you poor dear! If you think me worth having!"

*Worth having!* Sherbrand's glorious Patrine. Whom to be near was heaven on earth. Whom to obey was a lover's luxury, even when she had issued the mandate:

"Now, you must come to the Club and lunch with me, and meet my friends. Do be decent to them!"

Perhaps you can see Sherbrand bowing rather stiffly to Margot and accepting with the briefest hesitation the smallest of offered hands.

"I thought it must be the same!—I was certain there couldn't be two Flying Sherbrands. Pat!—Mr. Sherbrand can't deny the relationship, though he disapproves of Franky and me most fearfully. You'll have to teach him,"

went on the coaxing little voice, "that we're lots and lots nicer than he thinks us! For we've got to be friends," said Kittums, "if you and my dear Pat are going to be married! No time like the present! Can't we begin now?"

What a vivid little face it was, though there were tired marks like faint bruises under the great dark eyes, and the rose-flush in the cheeks was less bright than it had seemed in June. He released the tiny jewelled fingers, and found himself presented to the husband.

"Frightfully glad to meet you—more reasons than one!"

Franky, slim, sleek-headed, and dapper in unblemished Regulation tea-leaf, held out his hand, saying as he looked the other squarely in the eyes:

"If I had known your Home address, I should like to have dropped a line to you, when I—when I saw the newspaper yesterday."

"My mother lives at Bournemouth. My father had been an invalid for years. I go down to-day by the afternoon train."

"Ah! Please remember me to my—Aunt Jeannette."

From what dusty shelf of memories had Franky reached down the name of his uncle's unknown wife? But it sounded pleasantly to Mrs. Sherbrand's son. The cloud upon his forehead cleared away, and his cold sea-blue eyes began to thaw into kindness:

"I'd like a word with you in private. Do you mind comin' out of this clackshop into the vestibulee?" Franky went on, quoting his favourite Jimmy Greggson, and with a word to Margot and a glance on Sherbrand's part at Patrine, the two men passed through the swing-doors. Here Franky wheeled, and said with effort:

"This is a bit subsequent! but—if there's time available and the date of my uncle's funeral doesn't happen to be fixed, I should like to say—" He grew furiously red and began to stammer: "My father . . . myself . . . Dash! how brutally I bungle! But my uncle has a right to—to lie in the

family vault with his ancestors. It's at Whins—the Church is in the Castle grounds. I can guarantee that my father—every facility—sympathy—proper respect—" He broke down. Sherbrand answered, now the cooler of the two:

"You are very kind, Lord Norwater. My mother has already received a telegram from Lord Mitchelborough conveying a message to the same effect."

"I engineered that!" thought Franky complacently. But he was fish-dumb. Sherbrand went on:

"She would thank you, as I do, gratefully. But my father—would have preferred to be buried where he died!"

"Good egg! And now there's another thing to get off my chest," said Franky. "You know you stand in for the Viscounty when I succeed my father, or if I get knocked out in this scrap—supposing I should kick without heirs! That being so, suppose you bury the hatchet and lunch with us? Wouldn't in Paris—perhaps you will now? The War seems to rub up old saws like new somehow. That copy-book tag about Blood bein' thicker than water! that's one of the ones I mean. In case my wife got left—do you tumble?"—the ambiguous term was quite expressive—"I'd like to think that you were—would be kind to her!"

"I should certainly—in that case—try to do what I could." A certain physical and mental resemblance showed between these two long-legged, lightly-built, clean-made Sherbrands, standing together talking of grave matters, with candour and simplicity and British avoidance of sentiment and excess of words.

"But,"— Sherbrand found himself yielding to an impulse of confidence in the owner of the brown eyes that were some inches below his own, "this War is my chance! I'm a certified pilot-aviator and constructor and engineer. Perhaps there'll be a chink in the Royal Flying Corps for me—and many another fellow like me—before long—I hope, not very long! For my father's sake as much as for my own, I'm bound to make good—you understand?"

The brown eyes understood. His kindred blood warmed to the look in them.

"He knew—my father knew that he had failed in life through his own fault. He did not resent his brother's attitude. He bore the consequences more or less patiently, and when he died he left the cleansing of his name to me. Not that he was as badly to blame as people thought. He was born without sufficient of the quality called—objectivity. It's the power that keeps a man slogging, slogging in one groove without getting mechanical or stupid, as long as he attain his ends or can serve his country by keeping on. It's *indispensable!*"—he emphasised the word, his strong blue-grey eyes full on Franky's—"as indispensable as lymph in your inner ear-tubes. Without it you can't keep a level balance—whether you stand, or walk, or fly!"

"Miss Saxham—knows, I suppose?"

A flush crept up through Sherbrand's tanning:

"I have told her. It wasn't pleasant. But she—likes me enough to overlook it. She—seems to think I should never fail in that way! I hope to God I never shall!" The old boyish terror of inherited weakness cropped up in the tone of the man grown. "It would be horrible to suspect the bacillus of slackness lurking in my blood! If there is—the sooner I get scrapped, the better for her and for me!"

"Well, you've chosen the—kind of career that is going to use up a good many men pretty quickly." Franky was warming more and more to this big blond, candid cousin. "Not that I think there's much of the slacker about you. Few chaps more fit and nervy—that is, going by looks, you know! But if the Kaiser's Flying Men can shoot on the wing as well as they brag they can"—his brown eyes were watchful for a change in the other's face—"then——"

"Then I tumble out of my sky, a dead bird!" said Sherbrand, squaring his broad shoulders, "and someone luckier fills my place!"

"Thumbs up! Ten to one you'd come down with a

broken wing or so." There was something that touched Franky's latent quality of imagination in the fellow's queer way of saying "my sky." "This cousin of mine is a handsome fellow," he said to himself, "and a plucky one. And —by the Great Brass Hat!—now I come to think of it—the livin' image of old Sir Roger Sherbrand—his and my great-grandfather—goin' by the portrait in the gallery at Whins."

"So you're firm on joinin' the Flying Corps . . ." he went on, feeling for the moustache which had been reduced to Regulation toothbrush size. "Good egg You! Wish you all the sporting chances——"

"And better luck," said Sherbrand drily, "with Bird of War No. II. than I had with No. I.!"

"You're building a new 'plane?" The brown eyes were alight with interest.

"Rather! Come and have a look at her one day."

"Like a shot, if only I'd time! Did she tot to a hatful of money?"

"Something under £700. £500 of that goes for the new 'Gnome' engine. You see that German—" Sherbrand broke off.

"I remember! Pretty rough on you, that North Sea crossin' business. Must have been an awful loss. Look here!" Franky reddened again and began to flounder. "Could I—couldn't I—help with the boodle? Got £700 lying by idle. Frightfully glad if you'd let me chip in!—just in a cousinly sort o' way!"

"I am much obliged to you, Lord Norwater."

Confound the fellow! how he froze at the least hint of patronage. He went on, holding his head high:

"You are very kind, but I am not poor, unless as poverty is understood by people of your world. Apart from what my profession brings me I have something in the way of income. My mother's brother left me a sum of money that brings in yearly over £200." He went on as Franky regarded with unaffected interest the man who wasn't poor

on two hundred *per annum:* "The principal—I suppose it tots up to £6,000—I shall naturally settle on my wife."

He warmed and brightened with the utterance of the word. His cold eyes grew soft and his brows smoothed pleasantly. He said with a glowing pride, and a kind of brave shyness that a woman who loved him would have adored:

"I have said nothing yet to Miss Saxham about my hopes of a Commission—I suppose for fear of not pulling the thing off. But the moment it comes along I shall persuade her to marry me. We'll be man and wife before I fly for the Front."

As cocky as though he had landed the biggest catch in the matrimonial waters, thought Franky, instead of that great, slangy, galumphing young woman without a halfpenny at her back. But he did the amiable, in a way characteristic of Franky, ushering the guest back to the luncheon-room, introducing "my cousin" to people worth knowing, doing the honours with a pleasant cordiality that won upon Sherbrand more and more.

Sherbrand took leave directly after lunch, saying that he had to catch the afternoon express for Bournemouth. He had left his bag and suit-case in the hall-porter's care. Would Patrine?—Patrine read the entreaty in the hiatus and yielded to it, saying Yes, she would drive with him, and see him off from Waterloo.

"It's lovely of you!" Sherbrand said to her gratefully as they rose. She gave him her cordial smile and a soft glance from the long eyes. They took leave of their hosts and passed out together, heads slewing as the tall young figures went by.

Once in a taxi, spinning down Short Street, Sherbrand possessed himself of the hand he coveted. Its warm strong, answering clasp thrilled him to speechlessness. He looked at the long white fingers intertwined with his own, and asked himself whether he were deserving of a happiness

too great to be credited. When her shoulder touched his, its warm creamy whiteness gleaming through the dead-white of her thin sleeve, his heart drummed until it seemed as though she could not but hear it. But his was not the only heart that beat. . . .

"Thank you." It was her rich warm voice speaking close by his ear. "Thank you for being so nice to my Kittums! She is the truest little soul going. We have been chums ever since I joined the Club. Never quarrelled once—until she made up her mind to marry Franky——"

"And now you're going to marry Franky's first cousin." Sherbrand laughed rather breathlessly. "'Marry' . . . 'Marriage.' Two splendid words with meanings and meanings beyond meanings packed into them. Isn't it wonderful? . . ." He gripped the warm white hand in his strong brown one. "Pat, your pulses are playing a tune!"

"So are yours," she answered in a low tone.

"What is it?" He bent his head and set his lips in a swift caress to the back of the white hand. Then he turned it gently over and looked earnestly at the blue wrist-veins. They were full and throbbing tumultuously. Her blood was answering to the call of his. He set a second swift kiss upon them and his voice was unsteady as he said:

"I know the name of the tune, my wonder. Patrine! Love!—it's the *Wedding March!*"

"Whose? Grieg's, or Wagner's in *Lohengrin*, or Haydn's?"

"Neither Wagner's nor Haydn's nor Grieg's. Yours and mine! I told Lord Norwater to-day that I meant to make sure of you before I fly for the Front."

"You're going to the Front? Oh!—why?" Her long eyes looked at him with sharp terror in them. He answered:

"When the Powers that be offer me a Commission in the Royal Flying Corps."

"I see." She breathed freely. "And so—we are not to be married until then?"

"Would you—to-morrow, if I——"

"You know I would!" Her voice broke over him in a wave of tenderness. "You've made me love you—so dreadfully, Alan. Now if the little tin gods hear us—the spiteful little gods who spoil people's lives—something will happen to part us, soon."

His arm went round her and gathered her against him. He said with a great thrill of triumph:

"If the Great God is for us we can defy the little tin devils! It was He who made us for each other, brought us together—will bring us closer still!"

He added, as a handsome boy of nineteen or twenty, dressed at the zenith of the fashion, and already showing the worn lines of habitual dissipation, flashed by driven in a silver-grey Lanchester, with a notorious Cyprian enthroned at his side:

"How can I thank Him enough for what He has done for me? How many temptations He has helped me resist, that I might come to you clean to-day!"

"Were any of the temptations like Mrs. Mallison?" She had freed her hand from his, and now leaned forwards, hiding her clouded face from Sherbrand under the pretext of following the grey car with her eyes. "That was little Wyvenhoe with her. . . . How young he is! And how old she must be! Why, I've seen her portrait in a Book of Beauty dated forty years back—with a chignon and waterfall. They called her the Marble Marvel in those days, didn't they? Before she pitched her cap over the windmill, and made hay of the Prunes and Prisms. Now she acts in Music Hall sketches—has a voice like a raven's, paints a quarter-of-an-inch thick, and exploits Eton boys. Is anything the matter?"

Sherbrand had suddenly started and pulled his watch out. Now he rapped on the glass at the back of the chauffeur, leaned out of the window and spoke to the man, and resumed his seat, answering:

"The matter is that I had forgotten an important appointment. I can manage to keep it by the skin of my eyelids by taking the three o'clock train to Bournemouth instead of the two-thirty Express. You won't mind? You'll come with me and wait for me?"

"Not a little bit! . . . " she answered to the one question and to the other: "Of course I will!"

## CHAPTER LI

### THE INWARD VOICE

THE taxi, arrested and reversed on its way to Piccadilly Circus, was soon speeding Westwards. It whirred up Berkeley Street, traversed Berkeley Square, and turned into a short street ending in railings, enclosing grass wonderfully green for August, clipped bushes of evergreens, and some autumn-foliaged planes.

"We'll keep the man. I'll take his number. He'll look after my kit for me. Let me help you out, dear!"

He opened a gate in the railings and let her through. A large double house, with many windows, severely screened with brown curtains and wire blinds, loomed behind them, commanding the oblong patch of London green. The Modern Gothic porch of a lofty building of smoke-darkened freestone rose up before them. Patrine said under her breath, realising the ecclesiastical character of the edifice:

"Great Scott! It's a church!"

But Sherbrand, who had stayed to shut the gate in the railings did not hear the tabooed expletive. He caught her up and turned the massive iron handle of the porch-door which was braced by bands of iron with trefoil heads, and studded with heavy nails. They went down two shallow steps into an oblong, vaulted chamber, very cool and dark and fragrant, tesselated with squares of black and white stone. Slabs of black marble lined the walls to the height of a tall man. An inscription in Early English lettering, cut into the black background and gilded, caught Patrine's eye in passing. She read beneath the symbol of the Cross:

"Sodality of the Blessed Sacrament"

Under were lists of names, all male, ranged alphabetically. Her quick eye dropped to the initial S. and found Sherbrand there. But when she looked for her companion, he was waiting hat in hand, at a door some distance beyond them.

"You will come in and wait for me?" he whispered as she came towards him.

"Why not? As well here as anywhere!" He opened the door and she passed in.

To Patrine's left hand, close to the door by which they had entered, was a small unpretending altar supporting the tinted image of an emaciated, bearded monk in a black robe girdled with a white cord. A clustered pillar of red and white marble supported a shallow basin containing a little water. Patrine shrugged as Sherbrand dipped his fingers and made upon brow and breast the sacred Sign. Then he seemed to hesitate—dipped again and held the wetted finger tips towards her, evidently courting her touch. She shook her head hastily. Her eyes swept purposely past his, scanning the vast interior. They were standing in the shorter southern transept of what was *some* church.

The vast nave was dark and cool, full of silence and shadow and the perfume of flowers and incense, mingled with a fragrance far subtler than these. Pillars of richest Modern Gothic design supported the roof, whose forest of rich dark timbers showed little adornment, except at the Sanctuary end. Here coffering, diapering, and gilding made for splendour; rich marble cased the pillars and floored the stately choir with its rows of stalls, wrought in dark wood, elaborately carved. The north transept housed the organ, a towering instrument of many pipes. The scarlet cushion on the vacant organ-bench, the book of chants left upon the

rack, the black and yellow-white of the well-used keys, the numbered heads of the stops, showed through the lattice-work of a high wrought-iron screen, wonderfully painted and gilt. Between Patrine and the nave was a pulpit of red and white marble like the pillars, with a carved sounding-board of obviously ancient work. Rows of pews flanked the wide central aisle and the two smaller, and on the right of a lofty oaken screen that masked the west door, with the mellow light of a great rose-window falling on it, towered a huge Crucifix in black marble, upholding a white tortured Figure whose drooping thorn-crowned Head, like His hands and feet and side, dripped with crimson. . . . Patrine winced at the sight, and turned hastily away.

Now she was looking over the head of Sherbrand, who knelt before her upright and motionless,—at the High Altar, backed with a noble triptych, its three panels displaying the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the Nativity. A silver lamp depending by chains from the centre of the Sanctuary roof burned with a small steady flame before the Tabernacle —standing between tall tapers burning in gleaming candle-sticks, and vases of huge white golden-anthered August lilies—hiding behind its broidered curtains and golden doors, the Ineffable Mystery.

"Come!" Sherbrand's whisper said, close at her ear as he rose up. She turned and followed him down a side-aisle. "Sit here!" he signed to her, pointing to a narrow bench. He waited until she was seated, laid his hat and stick beside her, gave her a grave smile, bent his knees once more, looking towards the High Altar and moved noiselessly away.

Turning her head to follow him with her eyes, Patrine saw that the large dark church was not as empty as she had supposed. Kneeling or seated figures of men and women were scattered here and there amongst the wilderness of empty pews. The serried rows of rush-bottomed kneeling-chairs in either side-aisle showed aggregations of people, ten or a dozen together, chiefly in the neighbourhood of certain

narrow wooden doors appertaining to small structures that might be little chapels or vestries, set between groups of pillars in regular sequence down the length of the side-walls. Still following Sherbrand's figure with her eyes she saw him knock at one of the doors, wait as though for an answer, and enter. As the door swung towards her, she saw that it bore a name in gilt letters within an oval on the upper panel. Each of the doors, a questing glance satisfied her, bore a name.

Of course the little wooden chapels were confessionals. Was Confession the important business that necessitated Sherbrand's losing a train and foregoing the company of Patrine to the station, a favour so eagerly sought and so ardently received? Her red lips curled a little at the corners as she turned her face back towards the High Altar, rising within the low barrier of the red and white marble Communion-rail. So remote and pure and set apart with its tall, shining lights and gleaming vases of pure white lilies, its snow-white silk frontal embroidered with a golden ray-surrounded Chalice, its fair white linen Altar-cloth, with a running border of Old English lettering in dark rusty red:

"He hath borne our Infirmities and Carried our Sorrows. He was Wounded for our Iniquities. He was Bruised for our sins."

The words seemed to have a physical as well as mental force and impressiveness. It was as though they swept from the high white Table through the fragrant, wax-lit stillness of the Sanctuary, winnowing the still, spicy air of the dark nave and the lighter side-aisles as with wide, powerful, unseen wings. And despite the presence of nearly a hundred people scattered about the great building, the stillness was extraordinary. It got on the nerves.

Almost awfully upon the nerves. For a long way behind her, where the shadowy dusk brooded thickest, and the white tortured Figure of the Crucified hung drooping

from the great Cross of black marble against the background of the towering oak screen, it was as though the first great drops of a thunder-shower were falling, *pat, pat, pat!* upon the pavement below.

Merely a trick of imagination—and yet it tortured. One knew by sensations like these that one had been frightfully overstrained of late. One had done lots of things one regretted—several things one disliked to think of; one thing that made one hate oneself sometimes with a very fury of intensity, when one wasn't too busy hating *him*. But since *he* was drowned, one had felt it scarcely cricket to go on expending fierce resentment and savage disgust and acute loathing in that direction. One heaped it on the living of the two gross, sensual offenders. Oh God! when Sherbrand had said in that tone of triumph:

"*I come to you clean!*"

How inexpressibly one had abominated oneself. How one had shrunk against the side of the taxicab, pretending to look after wretched little decadent Wyvenhoe and the unquenchable Mrs. Mallison—feigning sudden absorption in the Piccadilly shop-windows, to escape those clear undoubting eyes that pierced one to the very soul. To be thought good when one was wicked, pure when one was the other thing; believed candid when one was a living lie. Ah! —that not only pierced but scorched.

If anybody, a month or so back, had asked Patrine: "Are you a Christian?" she would have retorted: "What are you playing at? Of course I am—I suppose!" Of late that conjectural Being she had called God had receded, faded, grown dimmer, and vanished. But here in the stillness, looking towards the Altar, she was conscious as those candle-flames went up like prayers from faithful souls, that Good and Evil were living warring Forces. You chose White or Black deliberately, and when Death came—it was anything but the end.

Her hair stiffened slightly on her scalp and a light shudder thrilled through her. She felt with a growing awe, and sense of dreadful certainty, that Someone was looking at her. And to relieve the insupportable tension she stretched out her hand, and took a squat, thick little book from the shelf below the seat in front of her. It was a copy of the Douai translation from the Latin Vulgate of the Bible, and there was a purple marker where she opened it, in the middle of the Book of Job.

"*Power and terror are with Him. . . .*"

That was the first line that caught her eye. A little lower on the page came:

"*Was it not Him that made life? Hell is naked before Him and there is no covering for destruction. . . . He stretched out the North over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing.*

"*He hath set bounds about the waters, till light and darkness come to an end. . . .*

"*The pillars of heaven tremble and dread at His beck. By His power the seas are suddenly gathered together, and His Wisdom hath struck the proud one.*

"*His Spirit hath adorned the heavens . . . and seeing we have heard scarce a little drop of His Word, who shall be able to withstand the thunder of His greatness?*"

It was like a Voice speaking—a Voice of inconceivable magnitude. It made one go cold, asking oneself the question: What if sin were an insult to Him? A scrap of filth flung in the Face of One who created the atom, the protoplasm, the cell, and the bacillus, and built from these in His own Image, Man.

Sitting in the stilly duskiness the woman He had made shut her eyes and tried to envisage Him. He was not the God of the Curate's Confirmation-class, nor the God the Anglican Vicar of the West End Church preached about, but a Being the hem of whose garment extends beyond the

confines of Space, and in whose lap lies Eternity. Infinite Goodness, infinite Love, infinite Purity, infinite Beauty, He could stoop to care for the little beings of His Workmanship so much, that for them He did not hesitate to sacrifice Himself in the Person of His Only Son. Did not love such as this make wilful sin an insult to Him in that Son's Person? Wasn't it—pretty rough on Our Saviour—to have poured out His Blood upon the Cross of Calvary as an atonement for the sins of men like dead von Herrnung, and women like Patrine Saxham, and know them still so beastly, so prurient, so base, so vile? . . . It began to dawn upon Patrine, still possessed by that strange hallucination of the Blood that dripped heavily from the tortured Body on the great black Cross behind her, how it might be that evil wilfully committed, opened its Wounds afresh. Drove the thorns anew into the drooping Head of the Crucified, pierced once more the Heart, that inexhaustible fountain of love. . . .

"*O! all you that pass by . . . attend and see if there be any sorrow like unto My Sorrow.*"

The words came cropping up through layers of sentences heard and forgotten, clearly as though a voice had spoken them at her side.

This afternoon the headlines of papers had shrieked of horrors. You remember that at seven o'clock in the morning two German Army Corps had poured into Belgium by the eleven strategic railways that provided for The Day. The vast grey-green flood of marching men, the huge python-like columns of machine-guns, the splendidly-horsed batteries of field artillery, the Brobdingnagian siege howitzers thundering behind their traction-engines, the miles of motor- and horse-drawn transport-waggons, carts, and lorries, blotted out the familiar features of the landscape, as, preceded by massed brigades of cavalry, with squadrons of Field Flying Service aëroplanes reconnoitring three thou-

sand feet overhead, the hosts of Germany rolled down towards the banks of the Meuse.

Directly in line of them rose the fortified City of Liége, termed "the Birmingham of Belgium," holding in the suburb of Seraign, five miles distant from the city, the huge Cockerill machine-plant and foundry, one of the largest ironworks in the world. They had stayed three hours at the frontier station of Visé, a Belgium Custom House town of less than 4,000 inhabitants, where a few squadrons of Belgian Cavalry and the Belgian 12th Line Regiment, aided by some heroic peasants, farmers, and townspeople had risen up with desperate gallantry to oppose their inevitable advance.

They had written the sign-manual of the Hun upon the ashes of Visé in the blood of its massacred inhabitants. Frightfulness, the many-headed hydra, was uncaged and let loose ere they rolled on to Liége peeved by their three hours' intolerable delay. While I who write and you who read far from the sound of fusillades, or the crash of shells or the yells of peasants dying amongst the flames of burning houses, learned of these deeds from the shrilly clamorous headlines, and asked one another with raised eyebrows, in incredulous voices: "*Can these hideous things possibly have been done?*"

Patrine had no doubt that they had been done!—were being done even while she sat waiting in Sherbrand's church for Sherbrand. Did she not know von Herrnung? Were not his fellow-officers and the soldiers he and they commanded, lustful, brutal, cruel, rapacious, arrogant, and pitiless even as he? He was a Type—not the isolated example of a new species. It would not be easily stamped out; its dominating characteristics would write themselves upon a conquered race. Those outraged wives, those violated daughters of Belgium would live to see it reproduced in the living fruit of their humiliation. What honest man could bear to stoop over his wife's bedside and meet the eyes of

the Enemy looking at him—from the face of a new-born child!

A rigor of horror seized upon her body and shook it. Her jaw dropped, her eyes closed as though they shrank and withered under their contracting lids. She slid from her seat and fell upon her knees helplessly. Her head sank forwards upon the hands that rose instinctively to hide her face. In the same instant Sherbrand's low voice speaking behind her turned the heart in her bosom to ice.

"Dearest—I am ready, that is if you are? My keeping you was unavoidable. I am going to Communion with my mother, before the Funeral Mass to-morrow, and I wanted to make my Confession first. Has the time seemed long?"

"Not long. Shall we go now?"

He bent the knee to the High Altar and moved with Patrine down the nave towards an altar dedicated to the Virgin Mother, that was on the south side of the church near the great west door. Wax tapers of several sizes burned in a brass stand beside the tiny altar-rail. Sherbrand lighted three tapers and placed them, felt in his waistcoat-pocket for a bit of silver and balanced it on the slotted top of the money-box too gorged with pennies to admit of the slender sixpenny bit. Then with a beautiful, devotional simplicity he knelt upon the narrow blue golden-starred cushion for a moment, looking up at the gracious veiled head that bent above.

But for the modernity of the tweed clothes, the pose of the athletic, lightly-built body would, with the mellowed light from the great rose window falling on the keen bronzed face and thick fair hair, have suggested a knight at prayer. In a moment he rose. They returned as they had come, passed through the chapter-house of the Sodality, and issued through the door into the garden. She said, as he triumphantly possessed himself of the dear white hand:

"Tell me, when you lighted and placed those three can-

dles and knelt down—what did you intend—what was it for? A practical insurance against a railway-accident?"

The dull, ill-timed gibe was no sooner uttered than she sickened with self-contempt. For Sherbrand answered with direct simplicity:

"Well, no! Call my three candles a reminder that I have asked Our Lady's help and protection and guidance for three dear people. My father, my mother, and my wife that is to be. For myself I asked that I might never disappoint you. You don't know how I shall try to live up to your belief in me!"

"You dear boy!" Touched to the quick response of tears she could barely falter: "You're a million times too good for me, if only you knew!"

"I know this—that the wide world doesn't hold another woman like *my* woman! Why, Pat, the very sound of your voice lashes all the blood in me into big red roaring waves of love."

"'Big red roaring waves.' Oh, Alan!"

She laughed, driving back the hot salt tears that stung her eyelids. The taxi was waiting at the corner of Blount Street, patiently ticking out twopence. Sherbrand whistled and it approached them. But this time Patrine did not enter. She could not now drive to Waterloo. It was much, much too late. She refused even to be dropped anywhere. She infinitely preferred walking. It was quite a pleasant stroll from there to Harley Street.

So they wrung hands and looked in each other's eyes and parted. When the taxi vanished round the corner of Blount Street, the tall, gallantly-borne figure in the golden-braided hat and pale rose gown began to walk swiftly towards Grosvenor Square. Suddenly it paused, wheeled, and returned upon its paces, passed through the gate in the railings and disappeared into the church.

In bed that night in the chintz-hung room at Harley Street, Patrine, recalling the experience that had followed the yielding to that irresistible prompting, wondered if it had actually taken place, or were woven of the tissue of dreams.

Kneeling upon a bast matting-covered hassock behind the door of the narrow little wooden cell into which she had slipped as a tall, grey-haired officer in Service khaki passed out,—she had rested her elbows upon a narrow ledge before her and peered through a close grating of bronze wire at a figure dimly descried beyond.

The priest was white-haired and of small stature. A meagre ray of light falling from above upon the hands clasped over the ends of the narrow stole of violet-purple that hung loosely about his neck, showed them wasted and yellow-white and deeply wrinkled. By the testimony of the hands he was an old man. Something in the manner of her address must have struck him as unusual. She had not spoken six words in her quick, hot, stammering whisper before he lifted a hand and said authoritatively:

"Stop!"

And as she had arrested the rush of her words, he had continued, in a grave, dry voice, quite devoid of unction or sympathy, cautiously lowered and yet wonderfully distinct:

"You say that you wish to 'confide something' to me 'under the seal of Confession,' and you are not a Catholic!"

"No, I am not! I suppose I would be called—a sort of Christian, though." She said it haltingly. "Does my not being a Catholic prevent you listening to anything I . . . want to say?"

The dry voice came back:

"I do not refuse to hear what you have to say. But Confession, Absolution, and Penance are Catholic Sacraments. I cannot extend the benefits of the Church to one who stands without her pale."

"I'm sorry! . . . I suppose, I really haven't got the

right to ask advice from you, or to expect you to keep anything—secret?"

There was a little old man's cough. The dry voice followed:

"I did not say that. As a priest, I am bound to give good counsel to those who ask it. And I promise you, also as a priest, to respect your confidence. . . . Now if you desire to go on—for I have several penitents waiting—I will ask you to do so. Be clear and truthful and brief. Mention no person by name. Let there be no exaggeration. Now begin! . . ."

"It's like this . . ." And she had blurted out the ugly, sordid story, that in the plain, unvarnished narration grew uglier and more sordid still.

He had listened without the movement of an eyebrow or the twitch of a muscle. At certain points where she had deviated from the sheer fact by a mere hairsbreadth the dry little cough had interjected: "Think again!" When she touched upon the circumstances that had resulted in "another man's" offer of marriage:

"You have accepted this other?" he had asked, and followed her affirmative by saying, quietly, just as he had told her she was not a Catholic: "You have not told him of—what has taken place. Is he an honourable, upright man?"

"Very!"

"H'mm!" said the dry cough. "What is his religion?"

"He is a Catholic."

"H'mm! . . . A devout Catholic?"

"He seems—awfully keen on his Church!"

A silence had followed, during which the beating of Patrine's heart and the singing of the blood in her ears had seemed to fill the clean little wooden place. Then:

"Do you intend to tell this keen Catholic," asked the merciless voice, "that you do not come to him—pure?'

"No! . . . At least . . ." The heave of her bosom

against the little shelf before the lattice made the dry wood quiver and creak. A deep sigh broke from her. The priest's voice continued:

"You have made it quite clear why you have applied to me. To be encouraged not to tell! But even for your own sake I advise you to make confession. Do you expect God's blessing upon a marriage that is—upon your side—a fraud?"

"Men aren't angels!" Patrine burst out rebelliously. "How do I know that he— Yes, I do know!"

His face had risen up before her, and his voice was in her ears saying with that note of gladness in it: "I come to you clean!" and shame and compunction choked her, as she added:

"He's straighter than I should have believed it possible for any man to be."

"H'mm!" The dry hacking old man's cough came again. He sniffed twice, sharply. Now he was speaking again.

"You have not known many—or any Catholic men before this one. Your doubt as to the existence of masculine purity proves with what type of persons you have hitherto mixed. For your own sake you will be wise to tell the truth to this gentleman. If you loved him you would tell him for his. Now you must leave. I have given you too much time as it is. Repeat after me as I dictate." He clasped the withered hands and began briskly: "*Oh, my God——*"

After a brief ineffectual hesitation, Patrine echoed him. He went on trailing after him a voice that stumbled and dragged:

"*Oh, my God! I am very sorry that I have offended Thee by the sin of fornication, and have yielded up my body to uncleanness, instead of keeping myself pure as Thou commandest. I beseech Thee for the love of Thy Son my Saviour Jesus Christ to bestow upon me the grace of a genuine sorrow for my sin; and while I implore that Thou wouldst mercifully spare me the*

*ruin and disgrace I have merited by my own act, I faithfully promise Thee to profit by the bitter lesson I have learned. But if I find myself as the natural consequence of my wickedness——*"

"*—of my wickedness——*"

The dragging echo failed. A mist came before her eyes.

"Go on," said the stern voice from the other side of the grating. It went on dictating:

"*But if I find myself as the natural consequence of my sinfulness about to be the mother of a child, I vow not to be guilty of any violence to the innocent. But to bear my bitter punishment meekly, as coming from Thy Hand. Amen.*"

She said the words. He blessed her with some such words as these:

"Now may God bless and forgive you, and bring your soul from darkness into His Light. Leave me now. Please shut the door."

She heard the dry little hacking cough again as she closed it after her. But she did not go away thinking him harsh and merciless. She had seen great shining tears dropping, dropping upon those withered hands.

## CHAPTER LII

### KHAKI

Remember how upon the great grey canvas of London, broadly splashed in with khaki, from the becoming dead-leaf of the Regular troops to the deadly ginger of the newly mobilised Reserve or the hideous mustard-yellow of the latest recruit to the newest Territorial unit—Recruiting posters of every shape, size, and method of appeal to patriotism, suddenly flared out, ranging from the immemorial red-and-blue printing on white to the huge pictorial hoarding-plaster in monochrome. Dash in as values the glow of re-awakened patriotism, the resounding silences in which Royal Messages to British Citizens and lieges were delivered by grave officials in scarlet gowns and curly white wigs, and the singing of the National Anthem by huge crowds gathered in front of Buckingham Palace, to cheer, over and over again the King, the Queen, and the Heir to the British Throne.

Recall how keenly-curious Britons densely thronged the neighbourhood of the Houses of Parliament, eager to ascertain the British attitude towards France and other Continental Powers; while immense aggregations of people blocked the entrance to Downing Street, surging outside the wrought-iron screens protecting Ministerial windows; congesting Whitehall until omnibuses proceeded at a snail's pace.

Revive the strange newness of things, the snap and tingle of seeing not only Royal Palaces and Government Offices, but vital places such as Arsenals, Docks, Railway, and Electric Power stations, Powder-magazines and Munition Stores closely guarded by men in tea-leaf or ginger-brown. Sickly the hot flush of things so new with the pale dread of ruin, the ugly rumours of Invasion. Shadow in

broad and black, a panic on the Stock Exchange, the dizzying fall of prices on Continental Bourses, the record slump on Wall Street, the frenzied stampede of the run upon the Banks, the Proclamation from the steps of the Royal Exchange of the strange thing called by nearly everybody—anything but a Moratorium; as, for example, a Monatorial, a Monoroarium or Honorarium, and so on.

Who could ever forget the excitement attendant on the sailing of famous passenger and cargo-liners with quick-firers and Maxims nosing through steel shields abaft the lower bridge? How the Red Cross notified its surgeons, nurses, and ambulance-helpers to hold themselves ready for business, and a neat khaki rig-out that had puzzled us in several unfamiliar details, turned out to be the Service uniform of the Royal Flying Corps.

German and Austro-Hungarian Reservists of all classes, summoned home by the strident bellow of Fatherland, surged round their respective Consulates. Prince Cheraowski, Representative of Germany, having had his passports handed him, shrugged the shrug of a disgruntled man, lighted a cigarette, and took a farewell constitutional through St. James's Park. And, on the Declaration of War with Austria-Hungary a few days later, Count Lensdorff received his walking-ticket, and gracefully vanished from the scene. And from the hall-doors of one Embassy in Carlton House Terrace and another in Belgrave Square, British workmen, cheerfully whistling, unscrewed the massive brazen plates. Crowds watched the operation in phlegmatic silence; the single individual who loosed a "boo" being promptly bonneted by a disapproving majority, and moved on by the police, while the windows of the British Embassy at Berlin were being shattered by brickbats, as were those of divers British consulates and Legations throughout the Fatherland. On the mud, stones, and verbal filth lavished on their inmates, of the Yahoo-like usage undergone by Englishmen and Englishwomen, we

may not dwell, but I do not think we are likely to forget.

Recall again, how vast public spaces carefully kept and tended by Committees and boards and Councils, became, as at the stroke of a wand, huge training camps of young, keen, healthy if pale-cheeked Britons in ill-fitting gingerbread or mustard-coloured clothes. How groups of unoccupied London houses, or large vacant stores, or the head-centres of the Y.M.C.A. in various districts, would suddenly overflow with bronzed and sturdy warriors of the Regular Forces, and as suddenly empty again. The platforms of railway termini, closely guarded and barred from the public, would be dotted with neat stacks of Lee Enfield rifles, while regularly-breathing sleepers in khaki pillowed on their packs, shielded by the peaks of their tilted caps from the blue-white electric glare, or the yellow dazzle of the morning sun. A whistle—a snort and clank of two big locomotives—and the platforms under the reverberating glass roofs would be empty again, under the dusty yellow sunshine, or the blue-white electric glare.

Remember all this to the daily accompaniment of those huge shrieking headlines, the trotting of innumerable iron-shod hoofs, the ceaseless rolling of iron-shod wheels, the clatter and vibration of huge motor-lorries, vans, and waggons commandeered for the use of the Auxiliary Transport (brilliantly painted in thousands of instances, and proclaiming in foot-long capitals the virtues of Crump's Curative Saline, or Bango's Extract of Beef), mingled with the steady tramp of marching men, all through the days and nights. By night you lay and listened to these sounds, mingled with the bleating of flocks of sheep, and the bellowing of herds of cattle, until the hoofs and wheels and marching boots mingled into the roar of one great ink-black, awful River, whose ice-cold woe-waters—sprung from some mysterious source—swept through our villages and towns and cities, carrying with them millions of lives, brute and human, towards the blood-red dawn of Death.

## CHAPTER LIII

### FRANKY GOES TO THE FRONT!

WITH the First Infantry Brigade of the First British Expeditionary Force went the First Battalion of the Bearskins Plain.

Exchanging with Ackroyd, "too sick a man for fighting" (who parted with several superfluous inches of appendix and convalesced in time to go out with the Second Battalion and meet a glorious end at Ypres), Franky was swallowed up in the vortex of Aldershot. ooo, Cadogan Place saw him but once more before the roaring flood whirled him away, like a slim brown autumn leaf, to the Unknown.

His gift to Margot on the night of their parting was a silver elephant of truculent aspect, having ruby eyes and mother-o'-pearl tusks and a howdah on its back, accommodating a "Gladsome Days" pull-off kalendar.

"You're such nuts on mascots and gadgets, best childie, I thought I'd get you this beggar for a keepsake. Saw it in a shop in Bond Street. It goes like so!"—Franky demonstrated by sticking a penknife-blade under the liberal whack of leaves that had become obsolete since the First of January. "Rather a neat notion. Something appropriate for every day o' the week," he continued, indicating a rhymed distich appearing beneath the current date. This, the first of many utterances on the part of the Silver Elephant, ranging from the idiotically inappropriate to the appositely malign, ran as follows:

*"Be very kind to Pussy-cat*
*And handle her with care:*
*You would not pull her by the tail*
*If her claws grew out of there!"*

"Well, if that's the best this beast can do—" began Margot, sternly surveying the proboscidean. Then she softened, meeting Franky's disappointed eyes, and said it was a lovely present and she would always keep it on the table by her bedside. She and Franky were almost lovers again for the brief time that yet remained to them. She even endured without open resentment his continual references to the child.

"Take care of you both for my sake, won't you, Kittums? Of course, long before Christmas I hope to be back with you! But"—he tenderly crushed the little figure to him as he sat on the bedside holding it embraced—"but if by any old chance I get sent in—remember what kind of man I'd like my boy to be. Sanguine, ain't I?—on the point of his being a boy—putting a pink geranium in the front window before the house is built, but still——"

He laughed awkwardly, and brushed off a shining drop of moisture that splashed on the slender brown leather strap that marks the officer's caste. A third star showed on his khaki sleeve, but he had made no reference to it, and Kittums omitted to ask what it meant. He kissed her gravely on the eyes and lips and forehead, unwound the slender arms that clasped his neck, and gently laid her back upon the pillows. Then with: "Good-night and God bless you!" he went quietly out of the room. The hall-door shut and a servant put the chain up, and the waiting car slid away to the Tower. For "I'm to kip down at the old shop for to-night," Franky had explained, "and shepherd five hundred strengthy foot-sloggers—fat as prize bullocks every one of 'em!—to Nowhere in Particular in the morning."

Margot cried a little when the hall-door shut, and then fell soundly asleep among her big pillows. Waking as a ray of five o'clock sunshine penetrated between the blue-green silk blinds and the lacy curtains, to realise that Something had gone out of her life.

Something wilful, petulant Kittums had not valued until the hall-door had shut behind it. Something that—crawling, shuddering thought!—might never return. She sat up in bed, hugging her knees and staring into a Future without any Franky in it, a tragic little picture against the background of the big frilled pillows, her great dark eyes wide and wild under her tumbled gold brown hair-waves, her paleness enhanced by the rose-silk night-sheath, a maelstrom of thought, emotions, apprehensions, terrors, whirling in the humming-bird brain.

The ray of sunshine presently touched the face of the electric clock and elicited a malicious twinkle from the ruby eyes of the Silver Elephant. Remembering her promise, Kittums put out a hand, pulled off the paper-slip bearing the date of the previous day and read:

*"May All Your Hours*
*Be Bright As This!"*

## CHAPTER LIV

### OFFICIAL RETICENCE

The First British Expeditionary Force was in France. Thus much after considerable delay was vouchsafed us. Some studiously unenlightening Field post-cards, some industriously Censored private letters, some Press narratives and photographs were permitted us, of Highlanders, Guards, Scots Greys, Middlesex, Worcestershires, Gordons, and others, brought in upon the midnight tide and debarking from huge transports at Boulogne and Havre and Rouen, under burning blue skies and a sizzling sun. The illustrated weeklies and the cinematograph showed them, with battery after battery of R.F.A. and R.H.A. and R.G.A., Ammunuition parks and columns, and Engineers with pontoons on motor-waggons, and Field Ambulance units, endlessly streaming into or out of the canvas cities erected on the sites of the old Napoleonic camps. Showed also Comic Relief, in the familiar form of British Tommy, grinningly appreciative of the welcome accorded him by command of the French Republic; meekly submitting to be plucked bare of buttons and badges, by sirens who sought these with offerings of chocolate, wine, and fruit. This meagre pabulum we champed, possessing our souls perforce, in patience; sitting before the great iron curtain of official reticence that had glided down into its grooves as though it never meant to go up again.

Then, with the whiffling swoop of the Jabberwock—the Food Scare was upon us. Letters showered from venerable maiden aunts in remote country districts, describing economies practised by our great-grandmothers in 1801 and 1814. Hot-eyed friends buttonholed one and whispered of

Famine that was coming, and pressed crumpled pamphlets, dealing with Food Values, into one's unwilling hand. The Specie Scare came next, rousing the most phlegmatic to frenzied indignation. What! In lieu of the smooth plump British sovereign and half-sovereign welcomed in every corner of the civilised world, must we perforce accept the "magpie," or One Pound note, and the "pinky" or ten-shilling bill!

People frothed and vituperated. We were all frothing, what time the stocky Kalmuck-faced von Kluck with 130,000 Germans of the Kaiser's First Army came rolling down in overwhelming force upon the First and Second British Army Corps. Eighty thousand men of our blood holding the line of the canal from Condé to "a place called Mons" with, as the flanking angle, another place called Binche.

The 5th French Army was in full retreat from Namur and Charleroi; borne back by the resistless pressure of von Buelow, Chief of the Second Army of Attila, 250,000 strong. The 4th French Army was retiring before von Hahsen and a third tidal wave of armed Germanity—humping its huge snaky columns after the fashion of the looper caterpillar—along the menaced line of the Meuse.

The Krupp and Skoda motor-howitzers that had crushed Belgian fortresses like eggshells were coming into position; the circling enemy aëroplanes were directing with smoke-rockets the uncannily excellent shooting of the German Artillery. We who thought we had no more than a couple of Army Corps in front of us, and possibly a Division of Cavalry, were beginning to realise the ugly truth. As the frightful blizzard of iron and flame broke upon the British batteries, and the shallow trenches made in desperate haste and crowded with the flower of the British Army, began to lose the shape of trenches, to melt—to become mere scratches in the earth, littered with human scrap. . . .

We did not suspect, we never dreamed of grave disaster

to our Forces, though some of us were strangely haunted by well-loved looks and dear familiar touches before the Iron Curtain of official silence lifted that quarter-inch and the thick red stuff oozed slowly underneath.

An hour or two before the Great Awakening, Margot had 'phoned asking Patrine to come round. Arriving, her friend found Kittums sorely exercised in spirit. The housekeeper, in tears, had sought an interview on the Food Question and entreated her lady to lose no time in provisioning the domestic citadel with Flour, Sugar, Bacon, Tea, Coffee, Potatoes, Cereals, and tinned meats against the approaching days of famine. She begged to submit a List. It would be well to lose no time for all the Banks were breaking. She felt it her duty to mention the fact.

"And so I told Wallop to dry her poor old eyes," explained Kittums, "and I'd go and buy up the Army and Navy Stores as soon as I'd had a look in at what Franky calls the Dross House, just to ask the Manager, as man to man, if there's any chance of the Bank going biff? Your adorable Lynette and your Uncle Owen may say that hoarding things to eat isn't playing the game and all that. Well! When you're too sharp-set to think Imperially, come round here and I'll grub the lot. How is your Flying Man?"

"Doing some Army Coaching. Out Farnborough way," said Patrine. "I've not set eyes on him twice since that Club lunch."

"When Franky cottoned to him so," said Margot. "You've not had a scrimmage?"

"God forbid!"

"Engaged people always squabble."

"Alan and I don't," asserted Patrine.

The car came round and they drove to the Bank. Most Banks had enjoyed a Run and a few had experienced the combination of a Run with a Panic. There had been a severe Run on Margot's bank. Now it was over and a

huge majority among the people who formed queues at the doors and crowded the counters were paying in the deposits they had nervously withdrawn. Relieved in mind, Kittums cashed a cheque of magnitude, and the respectable Williams turned the car in the direction of the Stores.

On this Day of the Great Awakening, Woman stormed the departments. Kittums and Patrine plunged into the scrum, to emerge after having achieved a modified success. Lady Norwater's explanation, that she required provisions in wholesale bulk because of a yachting-trip she meditated, had been hit upon by several thousands of other terminological inexactitudinarians. The mounds of bacon, the castled tins of tea and coffee, the sacks of sugar, rice, and cereals, the raisins, currants, and tinned comestibles—had been nearly all picked up by these knowing early risers. Still enough had been secured to relieve the mind of Mrs. Wallop, and scare the wolf from the threshold of 00, Cadogan Place.

"Beg pardon, m' lady." The sedate face of the respectable Williams looked over the last Brobdingnagian parcel transferred to his embrace. "I think if your ladyship 'as no objection it would be better to close the car."

"If it will close," began Margot, looking with interested speculation at the mountainous accumulation of bulky, whitey-brown string-tied bags and packages upon the front seat.

"FOOD 'OGS!" bellowed a man in a rusty bowler hat and soiled shirt sleeves, so suddenly and powerfully that Kittums jumped.

"Garn 'ome!" vindictively shrieked a fiery-faced female. "Greedy-guts! Yah! Git along 'ome!"

"FOOD 'OGS!" reiterated the Stentor in shirt sleeves, backed by an approving murmur from a crowd of dingily-clad men and women gathered upon the pavement right and left of the imposing entrance to the Stores.

"Now then, move on 'ere!" came from a policeman, and the crowd began to dissolve, with lowering glances. Motor-

cars were moving away, carrying their owners embedded in groceries. Others were driving up to the door.

"Move on, please!" repeated the Man in Blue.

"Not till I've got rid of these things. Call the Commissionaire. Tell him my name and number!—say the orders were given by mistake! . . ." Margot went on, when the Alpine range of parcels had melted away under the combined efforts of chauffeur and Commissionaire: "Poor old Wallop will wail, but I've purged myself of the contempt of being a Food Hog. Great Snipe! to think of deserving to be called such an awful name. It made me feel all of seventeen stone, with a row of chins like saddle-bags!" She pinched her own dainty chin between a tiny finger and thumb. "Still, I've enjoyed the scrum," she went on, as the car slid towards Piccadilly. It's bucked me splendidly! I shall know what to do now, when I want to lay my ghosts. You know one of them"—the little fingers twitched in Patrine's—"what's coming in November. The other started haunting me only a few days back." All the new-won colour had died out of the small oval face and the great dark eyes were tragic in their terror. "You're too good a pal to laugh. Well, then—I'll own up. Franky's my latest ghost of all!"

"But you have heard? You have had letters?"

The answer was strangled between a laugh and a sob.

"Letters. Three post-cards from Somewhere in France and a queer epistle all squares of blacking. Not much between—except that he is tophole and coming Home at Christmas and sends love to us both! That's Franky's way. He always talks as—" A shudder went through the little figure, and shadows were about the great wild eyes, and the pale lips quivered:

"Poor little Kittums!" said Patrine's big warm baritone. She slipped an arm tenderly about the little thing. Who could have dreamed that Kittums could care so about Franky—or any other man. "Are you worrying so badly,

my dinkie?" she went on, soothingly: "Try not. It isn't wise!"

"I'm not worrying," came the weary answer. "I'm being haunted—that's all. Day and night since it started, his hands are on me and his eyes are looking at me. When I sleep, I'm wandering through desolate places looking, always looking for him! And thousands of other selfish, silly women are being haunted in the same way. Oh, Pat, be always kind when you're married to your Flying Man!"

"*When!*—Patrine echoed. But what of sorrow or doubt her tone conveyed was lost upon Margot. She had told her own grief, and the telling had relieved her. Like the child with the kissed bruise, she could prattle of other things. She was twittering and chirping in the gay little voice Franky knew so well, as Williams, the respectable, turned smoothly into Short Street. There was a dense block at the corner by the Aldebaran Hotel, and amidst the swishing of the motor-engines and the fidgeting of plump carriage-horses, loathful of the sudden release of the pungent exhaust from escape-valves under their noses—a little piece of dialogue between two Cyprians on the near side-walk drove home to both the occupants of the car.

One Cyprian was well-to-do, past thirty-five and expensively caparisoned for conquest, from the tall feather topping her stove-pipe hat and her burnished wig of Angora goat-hair, to her silk stockings of liberally-open pattern and the tips of her high-heeled, buckled shoes. Her hard eyes under their painted brows took critical stock of the other, younger woman, whose make-up could not hide ill-health, and whose flaunting fineries were the worse for wear.

Said Hard Eyes, indicating with a jerk of her powdered double chin, a procession moving down Piccadilly Circus-wards—a publisher's catchpenny advertisement of "WEEP NO MORE, MOTHERS!" ingenious in its employment of robust-looking matrons as bearers of the sandwich-boards plastered with posters of rose-colour and gold:

"You could give some of the swell West End ladies a tip or two, I reckon, Lallie, about that Purple Dreams dope?"

"Honest to God, I could! But I wouldn't!" The haggard eyes leapt viciously out of their languor. "Let 'em run up against it—same as me! Me that went all the way to Brussels to get the new treatment. Great Scott! When I came to I was black and blue and green all over. And my face! It was a fair scream!" She threw an appraising side-glance in a shop window. "No! My skin'll never be what it used, I reckon."

"But the"—the hard eyes between the elder woman's blued lids were hideously significant—"the Trouble, eh?"

"The Trouble"—Lallie's still girlish shoulders shrugged. —"Oh, that's all right! I heard no more of it! There's the one comfort. Good-bye, ducky. I got to meet somebody at the Cri."

"Well, better luck!" And as the block broke and the car moved on, the women nodded and parted. Margot and her friend Patrine did not look at each other as the car stopped before the Club.

A glance showed the vestibule crowded, the second pair of swing-doors thudded momentarily as members and their guests passed on into the Club rooms, without relieving the congestion that fresh arrivals renewed. Some doors above, a piano-organ in charge of two men was jolting out the last bars of the Russian National Anthem. One of the men, olive-skinned, grey-haired, and dressed in threadbare black, sang the words with perfunctory fervour in a cracked tenor voice. As the last chord banged out and the organist jerked the changing-lever over, and the Marseillaise summoned jangling echoes of its lyrical frenzy from the pavement and the surrounding walls, Patrine, meeting Sherbrand's eyes over the crowded heads of people, knew a sudden shock of apprehension in the strangeness of their regard.

For day and night since that strange, impulsive visit she

had made to the Confessional—"*You must tell him. It is your duty to tell him!*" had sounded in her ears. She set her teeth and determined that she would never tell him, none the less knowing that the revelation would be made. A Power infinitely stronger than her woman's will was bearing upon it. Her treasure was in peril, her fairy-gold at any moment might turn to withered leaves at a breath from her own mouth.

## CHAPTER LV

### NEWS OF BAWNE

"PAT!—what luck!"

Sherbrand was standing before her, tall and lean and masterful, saluting her with the touch of three fingers to a soldierly forage-cap with three buttons, set jauntily atilt on the broad tanned brow.

Ah! the delight of seeing the cold grey glance warm into sea-blue, the lean, eagle-face flash into smiles. For a little while yet he was hers, she told herself, as the hard hand gripped on hers that answered the swift fierce pressure, and her blood that the sickly chill of fear had stagnated, whirled on its crimson circle singing for joy. And then—a second glance, sweeping from the top to the toes of the tall manly figure, stopped the song.

"Alan! You—in khaki!"

"I suppose so," he said a little clumsily, echoing thousands of other men. "It's the universal wear just now, isn't it? We fellows must make good while we can—and we're all of us joining. Even Macrombie—you can't have forgotten Macrombie—has got his rating, and is acting a P.O.T. on a Destroyer in the North Sea."

Do you see the dour drunkard standing up, under the eye of the smart young inspecting Fleet Surgeon, naked save for the leather bootlace that held a battered silver locket round his harsh and swarthy scrag.

"Your age? . . ."

"Ye micht ca' me forty," said the subject, with caution.

"I might, but I'd be a liar !" said the Fleet Surgeon, "so try again, my man!"

"Ye micht pit twa to the forr-ty," came rumbling from the hairy chest.

"And tack eight on to that," thus the Fleet Surgeon, tucking the hooked ends of the stethoscope into his ears, and deftly applying the microphone. "And then I'd be wide of the actual! Breathe deeply, will you!" The effort provoked a volley of coughs sounding like half-bricks pitched against the sides of an empty cistern and the Fleet Surgeon shook his head.

"*Hough—hough—hough!*—why didna' ye—hough! lat weel alane?" gasped Macrombie, with eyes blazing hell-fire through the moisture engendered by the cough. "Dinna ye ken I'll never no' be wanting to breathe deeply whaur ye're needing to send me? There is nae room whatever for lung-play oot o' the ordinar'," he added scornfully, "aboard ane o' thae kittle, cranky, tinpot Destroyers!"

"Hold out your hand!" commanded the arbiter of Destinies. He contemplated the extended member, wavering and fluttering like the indicator-needle on the dial of an atmospheric pressure-gauge. "Pretty wobbly, what?" he commented to the owner with the sarcastic inflection that advertised a keen advocate of Temperance.

"Man, O! man!" broke from Macrombie in a harsh rattling whisper, desperate appeal flashing in his burnt-out eyes, "you that are young enough to be my son, tak' me or leave me, ane or the tither—but shame me nae mair!"

Telegraphists were sorely needed, so Macrombie of the racking hoast and the shaky hand was passed as fit for Service, and duty rated as Petty Officer Telegraphist aboard one of the contemned tin-pots.

The Crown and winged double-thunderbolt must have nerved the arm they came back to. For, on the day of the Battle of Jutland, when a point-blank salvo from an enemy cruiser wrecked the bridge and searchlight platform, carrying away the forward mast and funnel of Macrombie's particular tin-pot, and men in respirators were fighting the

smothering fumes of the fire caused by German shells of the incendiary description, a dour, stark man whose clothes were alight and burning on him, stuck grimly to his post among the wreckage of the shattered Wireless room, sending out the message last dictated by the officer who lay dead across the blistering steel plating—for the short circuit set up by the smashed searchlight had created its own separate conflagration, and the electricity was "running out of everything like oil."

When the tin-pot heeled over, and, having duly buried her steel chest and secret documents, went down with colours flying in a smother of oily steam, men who were saved on the rafts told this tale of Macrombie, who sleeps well, after Life's thirsty fever, at his post in the Destroyer's battered Wireless cabin, on the deep-ridged, sandy bottom of the wild, shallow North Sea.

Patrine felt her heart crushed as in the grip of a cold steel gauntlet. Her apprehensions had not been unfounded. She and Alan were to be parted, if not as she had feared.

"I—suppose I ought to congratulate you—" Her unwilling eyes admired the tall manly figure in the plain workmanlike uniform. The buttonless tunic with its Lancer plastron, the riding-breeches of ampler cut than the cavalryman's, the high spurless boots of supple brown leather, and the belt that carried a revolver and no sword. "What—what are you in?" she asked draggingly, and he answered with a smile and a flash of his grey eyes:

"I hope I'm in for some of what's going on!"

"How glad you are!"

"Rather. I should think so! Now that they've let me into the Royal Flying Corps as a T. S. L. Look at my wings!" He touched the white outspread pinions on the tunic-breast with a reverent finger-tip and went on pouring out his story without a break. "It's cost me some badgering of High Officials of Military Aëronautics at Whitehall, and a lot of time wasted in baby tests. Squad drill, Harris

tube, bomb-dropping, air-signalling, Webley and Scott practice, and so on. Now I'm teaching trick-flying to Army aviators from 4.30 A.M. till 11 P.M. The Powers that Be have taken over the Flying Schools—Durrant's Café is our Officer's Mess now. You should see old Durrant in his glory as Head Waiter. And Mrs. D—" His white teeth flashed as he laughed.

"And they have known of this"—she nodded at the eagle-wings—"while I have been kept in ignorance! How long?"

"Not quite a fortnight. Don't be unreasonable, dear!"

The new tone stung. Did a yellow star upon the cuffs and shoulder-straps and a pair of white wings on the left breast mean so much to him that her just claims upon his confidence seemed wanting in reason now? Anger and resentment choked her as he added:

"I am here now, as it happens, because I'm crossing the Channel to-morrow at peep o' day." Something in her pale face made him add: "Don't worry!—I'm likely to be back again by nightfall. That's what I've rushed in here to tell you, though I've a man in tow, a Wing Commander of the French S. Aë. Hot from the Front and just landed at Hendon. I had to take him in my car to his Embassy, and now I've got to find him a room at an hotel. When I've done it I'm coming back here to talk to you. Where on earth has my man got to? Why, there he is, talking to Lady Norwater. The little chap with the grey moustache and the gold-banded *képi*."

"I am honoured by Madame's gracious remembrance," the person indicated could be heard protesting, during an instant's lull in the Babel of voices round. "But my own—a thousand pardons! is less accurate."

"Oh!" Margot expostulated, "but you can't have forgotten. That Sunday of the Grande Semaine—when you were in the Bois, timing a Flying Officer who was testing an English invention—a sort of a——"

"But assuredly, Madame!" His quick nod and the

gesture of his gloved hand summoned up the scene vividly. "I remember, but perfectly, though much water has rolled under the bridges since that day. And Milord—Madame's husband?"

"He's at the Front," Margot explained, "wherever the Front is!"

"Unfortunately at the moment," returned the suave voice, "the Front is everywhere. It is easy to find without binoculars. *Adieu, Madame. Merci bien de la souvenir si gracieuse, dites mes amitiés à Monsieur.*" And in another moment he arrived beside Sherbrand, exclaiming with his vivacious shrug and gesture: "My faith, my friend, your London *Cercle des Dames* is a veritable Paradise of Mahommed. Now in Paris, at least before the War—instead of ten thousand houris to every true Believer, one counted at least three Adams to every Eve. But I observe your search has been successful. Will you not present me to Mademoiselle your *fiancée?*"

And the dapper middle-aged Wing Commander in the gold-banded *képi*, whose dark plain uniform displayed the gold badge of the Service Aëronautique under the Cross of the Legion of Honour, was introduced as Captain Raymond by an off-hand young Briton who comprehended not in the least the immense condescension that had prompted the request.

"*Sapristi!*" thought Raymond, as Patrine gave him her large hand and assured him in her big warm voice that she was frightfully pleased to meet a friend of Alan's.—"A magnificent type of the human female animal to have paired with this bluff, simple English boy. Part *femme du monde*, part romping hoyden, part *cabotine*, she should have been a Duchesse of the old Napoleonic *régime*, or at least the effect that lies behind a *cause célèbre* of the Paris Law Courts of modern days. And she will be expected by this honest fellow to live in a stucco villa at Kensington or the Crystal Palace, and bear and rear his children, and live and die in

all the deadly respectability of the British middle-class *milieu!*"

But he made his beautiful bow and murmured some civil phrases. In the spring, at the Hendon Flying Grounds of M. Fanshaw, he, Raymond, had been interested to meet the friend of Mademoiselle. Had been profoundly impressed by the displayed inventions of a young man so gifted as aviator and engineer. Had had the good fortune subsequently to obtain the consent of his own Chiefs of the S. Aë. F. to a test of an invention—the value of which had been hall-marked by the approbation of Messieurs les Allemands. True, M. Sherbrand had been the victim of their unscrupulosity. But Fortune, who knew? might be kinder in the near future. This War so grievous, so brutal, so deplorable, waged by the Prussian against Civilisation and Progress, would open up not only *le métier des armes*, but countless other avenues of prosperity to thousands of ardent and gifted young men. Like M. Sherbrand. To whom Raymond said with an authoritative glance of his blue eye: "My friend, we keep your auto waiting at the door!"

"Ah, but stay!" Patrine began, with a sense of hatred towards the well-used little Ford runabout standing in much grander company by the kerb outside the Club: "do stay and lunch and smoke and tell us things about the War, won't you?"

"A thousand thanks, but impossible, Mademoiselle!"

Raymond shrugged, conscious that her look of disappointment was for Sherbrand, and pleaded fatigue as an excuse.

"For these are iron times, Mademoiselle," he went on in his smooth, musical accents, "and we who live in them are unfortunately of flesh and blood. When the War is done perhaps there will again be social pleasures like the lunch you were so kind as to offer me. That I am tempted to accept I will not conceal from you. I have not eaten since I flew from France at *la pointe du jour*—one of the smallest

of the little hours of this morning, and then I broke fast on two fingers of little red wine, and a hunch of soldier's bread."

"You mean to say you're fresh from flying the Channel?"

"Crossing the Channel came near the end of my journey, Mademoiselle. I should have arrived earlier"—he shrugged indifferently—"had not some German aviators caused delay."

"Oh-h!" Her vexation passed like a breath from a mirror. Her long eyes danced with delight under her hat-brim. Her breath came quick, her red lips curled, and a sweet faint pink showed under her creamy skin. "You're a knight of the skies hot from a fray with two flying dragons—and you were going without saying a word! What do you think we Englishwomen are made of?"

"Very desirable flesh, some of you, at least, Mademoiselle," occurred to Raymond, but he suppressed the equivoque and answered with professional brevity:

"Mademoiselle, I regret there is but little to tell you. The enemy possesses an aërial organisation of great effectiveness which is being chiefly employed in the killing of harmless civilians and the destruction of unfortified towns. But small success has hitherto attended his efforts in the Channel. Your British Expedition was conveyed across the water without the loss of one *piou-piou*, or any damage received by the explosion of a German bomb. As for the German aviators of whom I speak, their attitude towards myself and my pilot was modest. Flying their double-seated military Taubes, of which the wings and tail resemble those of the dove after which they have been named, they pursued our biplane half-way from Calais to Dover before deciding to attack."

"Then—" She hesitated, softly clapping her palms together and dimpling like a big child over the telling of a new fairy tale.

"Then one climbed, possessing the advantage of a

powerful engine, and dropped a bomb from a height of some 600 *mètres* which exploded without hitting us and went to the bottom of the sea. While the second aviator, who was armed with a repeating-carbine, wounded my pilot so severely that it was only by a miracle of endurance he preserved consciousness long enough to land without a crash. So I left him at Dover and—with a pilot mechanic from the Air Station, completed my passage, descending at Brooklands at twelve *demie.*"

"Was your pilot hurt very badly? Will he be able to fly back to France?"

"Mademoiselle, being a pious Catholic, he has already flown to Heaven."

"He is dead. . . . And you can joke!" Patrine reproached him. His face was very wrinkled as he smiled.

"Mademoiselle, if a soldier could not jest at Death upon occasion, Life for a soldier would be impossible! Of verity, the loss of a good pilot-*aviateur* is not a thing to joke about, but fortunately I have your friend to fill his place."

"*Alan!* You must not—I will never consent to it!"

All taken aback, her colour banished, she fixed Sherbrand with blazing imperative eyes. He reddened to the hair and his mouth shut firmly. For the first time there was a clash of wills between the pair.

"Alan, why didn't you ask me?"

He was redder than ever.

"Because it wasn't for you to say. It is an order from my Chiefs—don't you understand?"

She did not care that the French officer was smiling. She would have liked to have struck him in his merrily-crinkled face. Wretch! to have blurted the truth at her that Alan had hidden. What was he saying:

"Permit, Mademoiselle, that I make my *adieux.* I go to secure an apartment where I may repose myself." He looked at Sherbrand, saying in his cool tone of authority: "The Aldebaran,—that is in the next street and a good

hotel, is it not so? A little sleep will not come amiss after a cutlet and a *demi-bouteille*. And whilst I eat we will settle our *affaires*. Eh, mon lieutenant?"

His gloved hand took Sherbrand neatly by the elbow. He was skilfully steering him towards the doorway when Patrine, white and flaming, placed herself in their path.

"My affairs come first!" she was beginning.

"*Shut up!*" came from Sherbrand, in an exasperated aside whisper. "My duty comes before you—or anything in the world. It should come first for you if you cared a damn for me!"

No one but Raymond had overheard the curious, fierce colloquy. She felt literally scorched by the hot look of anger. She knew an agony like the tearing of the tissues of the flesh when Sherbrand passed her and went out with that gloved hand of authority upon his arm.

"Women are the devil!" he thought bitterly, as he opened the door of the runabout Ford to admit the French Staff Officer. "She'd had a shock in being told the news so suddenly; but to ballyrag me—to make me look such a thundering idiot before *him!*"

He swung the crank with violence and wrenched angrily at the levers when he took the driving-seat. A gloved hand patted his arm, and Raymond's voice said in his ear:

"Bah! You are chagrined, my friend, because a handsome woman has made you a little drama. Think no more of it! I have forgotten, for my part." He added, as they got out at the Aldebaran: "I propose to detain you but a little while, *mon ami*. When we have completed arrangements for the start to-morrow, you will be free to return and make your peace with Mademoiselle."

"Thank you, sir. She was rattled at my telling her so suddenly about my Commission," said Sherbrand, still beclouded. "Women are all like that, I suppose?"

"Except in France," said the agreeable voice of Raymond, "where the love of Country is stronger in our women

than the love of lover or even of child. It was so before 1870. They have remembered through the centuries, as their sisters of Britain have not. They—the women of England are patriotic—oh yes! but patriotism is not yet a religion to them. It will cost millions of lives, and of blood an ocean to kindle that flame within their souls. Then, they also will hold the bayonet to the grindstone with their soft white hands and say: 'Become sharp, to drink the blood of Germans!' And they will mend the soldier's ragged breeches and clean the soldier's dirty rifle, and when they do they will not be less womanly. No, by my faith! nor less beloved by men. Try one of these. You will not find them too bad."

He offered Sherbrand a cigarette and took a light from him as they stood under the Aldebaran's tall Corinthian portico.

"One should always be accurate. When I told you that in France there lived no woman who was not patriotic, I was in error. Such a woman existed since three or four days."

He blew out a puff of smoke and watched its mounting spiral. Then he resumed:

"She was very young, very pretty, the bride of a month, and passionately enamoured. When her husband received orders to proceed with his Regiment of Chasseurs to the Belgian Front, she made him a scene of desperation. She would do this and that mad thing if he did not take her. Then she became calmer. She had exacted a promise from her doting cavalryman. She should visit him at the Front at a suitable opportunity. She chose her own moment, my faith!—and what a moment! She appeared in her husband's quarters in the French cavalry camp near Antoineville when the Germans were attacking Dinant. When the Cavalry Division of the Prussian Guards, and the Cavalry of their First Division, with some infantry battalions and machine-gun companies crossed the Meuse, and we were to

attack, she was lying in his arms, the little idiot! He told her to go and she would not. Then he entreated her—a fatal error that!"

The cigarette was burning crookedly, forgotten between Raymond's fingers.

"Then he commanded her. She laughed, and kissed him. He gave back the kiss, drew his revolver and shot her dead. Then he ran out—in time to mount and wheel to his place as second in command of his squadron, before the Regiment swept on to the charge. Fate was kind to him. He charged like a Centaur, and died like a soldier of France the Beloved. Tell the story to Mademoiselle Saxham. She is magnificently handsome, but forgive me! not a patriot. And a woman without patriotism is—an altar without a Sacred Host and a lamp without a flame."

They went into the hotel. When the Frenchman had secured a quiet bedroom on the fourth floor, and intimated that no German was to serve him, they went together into the dining-room.

"*Pfui!* It smells of soot, and petrol, and drainage, this London air of yours," said Raymond, as he chose a table in a quiet corner. "You will eat with me? No! Then smoke and share my wine." He ordered cutlets, *petit pois*, a sweet omelette, and a bottle of Beaujolais, and, filling his own glass and one for Sherbrand, touched brims gaily and said with a smile: "To France and her Allies, Victory! On earth," a clink, "by sea," a clink, "under the sea," another clink, "and in the Air!"

He clinked three times, and emptied the glass thirstily. Sherbrand asked:

"Was the battle near Dinant a big affair?"

"Not big." He broke a roll and munched bread. "Not on the grand scale. A *spectacle très intéressante*, regarded from the—archaic point of view. An example of the ancient *mode de bataille* that will be dead as the Dodo in three months. *Chasseurs à cheval* and German Imperial

Guard Regiments charging and meeting with shocks like thunder. Much slaughter. So fierce was the onslaught upon our side that the Germans were driven back across the Meuse. Many missed the bridge and were drowned. One French regiment followed them in pursuit for several *kilomètres*. They were led by the man of whom I have told you. A glass to his memory—and *hers!*"

They touched full glasses and drank. Raymond went on.

"My Flying Centre was near Maubeuge on the 16th. Some *escadrilles* of my command were engaged that day near Dinant. My faith! those *côtellettes* are slow in arriving." He munched more bread, and his blue eyes narrowed smilingly. "We had only the little bombs we used in Morocco, but yes!—we did some good work with the *ballesbon*. Flying low, at ordered distances—for to make War by Air successfully the science of tactics must assist the aviator. . . . What says your great Field Marshal, who has bent his neck to the collar-work of Administration—who has conjured an Army of trained soldiers out of your shops and counting-houses, and playing-fields,—and will make another and another when the time comes?"

Sherbrand quoted the words uttered by the great voice now quenched for ever in the bitter waters of the North Sea.

"*Until aviators learn to fly, manœuvre, and attack in regular formation, the Fifth Arm will remain a useless limb.*"

"*Tonnerre de Dieu!* but that goes to the point," said Raymond, "straight and sharp as a thrust from his sword. If we possessed that man we should make use of him. He should be Marshal of France, or President or Emperor—all we should ask of him would be to lead us. *Notr'* Joffre would not be jealous—they would agree like the hilt and the hand. But I was telling you of an attack by the *flèchette*. . . . You may imagine how the Uhlans loved that rain of steel. It changed the retreat to a rout. Only it

spoiled so many German horses. Right through the man, you understand, into the animal! . . . Sieves on four legs are useless as Remounts for French Chasseurs."

"And the German Field Flight?" Sherbrand interrogated.

"Their Fifth Arm was represented," said Raymond, sipping his burgundy, "by many Taubes and Aviatiks armed with the machine-gun and some ordinary bombs of *schrapnel*,—also a dirigible of 'Parsifal' type dropping big bombs. We were hampered in our offensive by a prejudice which does not trouble the Germans. To throw bombs upon friend and foe alike—that is not our idea of War. It annoyed me, and I wasted on that flatulent brute of a 'Parsifal' all my remaining *fléchettes* and little Morocco bombs. Aha, the *côtelettes!*"

A waiter set them before him. He tucked his napkin under his chin, and helped himself, and said:

"Thus, though I had damaged her steering-gear and riddled her outer envelope, and the Flying Pig wallowed in difficulties below me, I could not pursue the advantage I had got. When the pilot of an Aviatik launched himself to the rescue, all the ammunition of my carabine was exhausted. I had one cartridge left in my automatic revolver, and not a single bomb with which to return the compliments of the German's *mitraille*. My petrol-tank had been perforated. My single bullet missed him. The duel was too unequal, so I withdrew from the field, leaving him to cavalier the Flying Pig. We may meet again upon terms more equal, when French military aviators fight with machine-guns. And now to business. It concerns your gyroscopic stabiliser, the patent of which my Chiefs desired to buy for the use of our *Service Aëronautique*. You demanded, according to M. Jourdain's statement, £8,000 and a royalty for the world-patent. We will buy it of you outright for £12,000. Is it agreed?"

Sherbrand straightened in his chair, and said, looking the other squarely in the eyes:

"No, sir, thank you! You see, though the War Office wouldn't have anything to say to me——"

"It occurs to you that now you may find a market for your invention?" *To the devil with this smug young British tradesman!* thought Raymond behind his knitted brows. "Come!" he said. "Another proposal. Will you make and supply us with your hawk-hoverer? Or sell us the right to manufacture a thousand for the sole use of the S. Aë.? Name your price—I shall not be frightened. It is not State money, but my private fortune that I draw upon—with the approval of my Chiefs. It has been my whim to lavish on my *escadrille* what other men hang in jewels upon their mistresses. Efficiency is my vice. I have heard of worse!" He scrawled some invisible figures with a polished finger-nail upon the tablecloth and exclaimed, with a laugh and a shrug: "*Sapristi!* At even a hundred pounds apiece you would soon be a millionaire, even without the fortune you expect from your War Office! Upon occasion it pays to be a patriot. Decide, Monsieur, lest my patience run dry before my purse!"

"I've not asked you a hundred, sir," Sherbrand said with his disarming simplicity. "I can make and sell the hoverers at a profit for £60. It's the cutting and welding of the horizontal flanged screws with the acetylene flame that eats up that money. But for the cost of the process, hang it!—I'd have had more than seventy ready by me now."

"You have seventy, you say, laid by in readiness?"

"Laid by in grease," said Sherbrand, "at the aërodrome."

"Waiting the moment when the authorities at Whitehall awaken to the fact that you are a genius, *mon ami! À la bonne heure!* We buy your seventy equilibrisers!"

"I'll sell you ten," said the British tradesman doggedly. "And I'll give the Belgian Government another ten, if you think they'd honour me by accepting them?"

"*Parole d'honneur!* I can guarantee they will. And of the other fifty?"

"They are for England to take or leave," said Sherbrand. "No doubt I'm an ass, but a man must act according to his lights."

"They are stars, your lights," said Raymond with a crackling oath, "and they point the path of Honour!" He pulled a cheque-book and a fountain-pen from a pocket within his tunic and wrote a cheque on the Crédit Lyonnais for the price of the ten stabilisers, their packing, carriage and duty, saying as he signed, and tossed the lilac slip of paper across the tablecloth: "Your endorsement is my receipt. For the stabilisers—they must be sent not later than to-morrow. I would give something if I could fly back to France with a couple in my valise. But patience! In a week at most we will give the Germans news of us. Perhaps I shall have the good fortune of a *rencontre* with my Boche pilot-aviator. For—listen, lieutenant! He too possessed the device that solves for the *avion* the problem of stability. And—listen well!—he carried a young boy with him in the *nacelle*. It was the man who robbed you. Von Herrnung! Could you not have guessed before?"

It seemed to Sherbrand that he had always guessed. Raymond went on:

"When I read of the finding of the wreck of your 'Bird' in the North Sea, I knew what *coup* the Prussian and his confederates had carried out. We had met in Berlin, and at the Hanover aërodrome, and at Paris. And—I could have shot him the other day if it had not been for the child. The legions of the modern Attila employ women and babes as bucklers and breastworks, by their Emperor's order. Perhaps he carried the boy for protection!" His moustache bristled like an angry cat's as he added:

"A beastly idea, but the German Idea is bestial. Well, *au 'voir!* To-morrow, six *demie*, we start from the aërodrome!"

He rose, whisked his napkin over his mouth, and said, giving Sherbrand a hearty hand-grip:

"I shall be punctual. Do not forget. My compliments to Mademoiselle!"

But Sherbrand was occupied less by thoughts of his angry love than by Raymond's story of the boy in the German warplane. He telephoned to Sir Roland and to Saxham before he drove back to the Club thinking:

"Bawne!—It must be Bawne!—out there in the midst of all those horrors. If I could only meet that fellow von Herrnung! . . . I've owed him no grudge because he robbed me. . . . But—for this—I could kill him now!"

## CHAPTER LVI

### LA BRABANÇONNE

"You saint, Pat!" Margot, amidst Raymond's polite excuses, had recognised Sherbrand's hatchet-face under the khaki cap. "You've stolen a whole morning for me from your Flying Man. Why didn't you tell me he'd come back to town? How perfectly tophole he looks in tea-leaves! Franky and I came across that French officer who was with him, last June, in Paris. We're been rubbing noses on the strength of having met before. Is Alan going to the Front? My poor Pattums, it'll be your turn to be haunted. Here's Rhona Helvellyn. Cheer, Rhona! Do tell us why you look so smudgy? Have you been hiding up the chimney of the House of Commons, or bombarding a Minister's front door with coal?"

She beckoned, and Rhona came stalking through the crush of marvellously got-up members, the round, fair, freckled boy-face that topped her long swan-neck and deceptively sloping shoulders pinched with weariness under the wreck of a Heath hat, her usually immaculate tailor-mades covered with the dust of what might have been a Claxton Hall conflict or a Downing Street Demonstration, and strange fires burning in her light-lashed eyes.

"Am I such a sweep? I feel one! But so'd you be grubby if you'd done the crossing from Folkestone to Ostend and back again to London without a dab of a puff. I'd an appointment here at three-thirty." Beyond anything in life Rhona plumed herself on her punctuality. "Mrs. Saxham—*the* Mrs. Saxham, had promised to meet me in the Chintz Room." The Chintz Room is the first-floor drawing-room securable for private teas and interviews. "We

got in too ravenous even to wash for lunch. You should have seen us eat. My hat! the scrum on those boats. And the dirt. Nothing but a Turkish bath will get me clean again. As for Brenda, she's a nigger." Thus Rhona in her loud young accents. "Nobody'd believe she'd been born a white girl!"

"Is she here?"

"My Christmas! I should rather hope so! Upstairs scraping off the top-crust before I take her to Eccleston Square. Don't do to startle the Mater. She's been frightfully off-colour with worry over her precious youngest. You see, Brenda was due home for the Autumn holidays from the Convent of the Dames de l'Annonciation at Huin on the Sambre, when the War broke out. And—Huin's near Charleroi, where they say the Germans are—and we'd nary a letter, and no answer to a hailstorm of wires from the Mater. So I got passes and permits on the Q. T. and skipped over to Ostend—to see what might be done."

"And you got through?"

"Did I? Not much! We don't get things properly rubbed into us—tucked away in our blessed old island. I forgot that Belgian trains wouldn't be running from Ostend to Brussels, now the Germans have got a grab on there. . . . As for getting South-East by Courtrai and Valenciennes—all trains were required by the Allies for military purposes. Perhaps if I'd been a hefty War Correspondent or an Army Nursing Sister or a V.A.D. in diamond earrings and a Red Cross armlet, I'd have had a chance. But I'm doubtful! Transport officers, English and Belgian, keep their mouths shut—and once they've opened them to say "No!" they never open 'em again. And"—Rhona breathed as though she had been running—"there were Official War News placards stuck up at the Customs Office, and on the quays and at the Préfecture. They said that the Germans under von Buelow have been having a scrap with the 5th French Army on the Sambre—from Namur to Charleroi—

and that the French have been beaten back. And the hospitals are crowded with Belgian and German wounded"—she gulped and something twinkled on her pale eyelashes—"and trains crammed with more keep coming in and in. I've seen some sights, I tell you, that gave me horrors. That showed me, even more than those Ostend quays and wharves and squares and Places—packed solid with refugees—Great Christmas!—shall I ever forget 'em !—the devilish, hellish work of War!"

"Refugees. . . . Common people?" Margot was a little puzzled. Rhona nodded and repeated:

"Refugees. Swells and mechanics, rag-pickers and shopkeepers, sweeps, schoolgirls, lacemakers, and students. Professors, priests, and prostitutes. Madame la Comtesse and her gardener's wife, wheeling the babies in trams and go-carts. Dust-covered, dirty, done up, desperate, with faces that make you think of the damned in the Tartarus scenes of Orpheus and Eurydice. And someone squealed my name, and there was Brenda. Just got in, with three of the Sisters, and a baker's dozen of English pupils and a herd of other miserables, evacuated from Charleroi and Huin. Three-and-a-half days on the journey, travelling by fits and starts on branch-lines—tramping when trains weren't available. Eating whenever anything was to be had, and going without when there wasn't! Sleeping in barns and on the floors of railway-station platforms, or waiting-rooms, when they were lucky—such a pack of tramps you never saw in your life. But Great Scott! how thundering glad I was to get hold of Brenda and whisk her away from that Chorus of the Damned in Orpheus, pent up like cattle behind ropes, and moaning and stretching their arms out to the sea!"

"Why on earth the sea?"

A foreign voice, resonant and rather nasal, startled Margot by answering:

"Pardon, Madame. Because these most unhappy fugi-

tives believe that salvation and safety may be found in England, from whence come those strong brown English soldiers who are fighting in Belgium now."

"Are there—" Margot was beginning. But Rhona was introducing the speaker at length as Comte d'Asnay, Capitaine Commandant and Adjutant of the Belgian General Staff, Attached to the General Staff on the Third Division of the Belgian Army, and d'Asnay was saying with a smile:

"Mademoiselle bestows upon me all my titles, possibly because we Belgians have so little else left."

"Except Honour," snapped Rhona.

"Except our Honour and our self-respect, and a few other non-negotiable securities," he said, "that do not bring us much of credit on the Bourses of Vienna and Berlin. But Madame was asking of the refugees. Many from Liége have escaped to Antwerp or into Holland, thousands are rushing from Namur into the bosom of France. But from Louvain and Brussels and Tirlemont they flock to Ostend. The steamers of the Channel service are crowded with those who have money and can obtain the necessary *laissez-passers*. Your town of Folkestone is encumbered with arrivals. Were stones pillows there would be a head for every stone. But those who have neither money nor passports—and many of these were rich a week ago—remain, as Mademoiselle has told you, to weep, and stretch their arms towards the sea."

"They'd rush the boats," declared Rhona, "only that the Companies keep up the gangways. I suppose," she grimaced, "the authorities at Ostend don't want a scare. They believe—I hope they may get it!—there'll yet be an Autumn Season. Hang these profit-hoggers! If I'd my way I'd lower every blessed gangway and let everyone who wanted walk on board. If Belgium hadn't faced the music there'd be Germans in England now, murdering and burning. . . . They've a right to come. Let 'em all come! Britain's big enough, I should hope!"

"*Brava, Mademoiselle. Bis!*" d'Asnay applauded noiselessly. "That is what you said to me on the deck of the steamer. Say it again, say it often, and the people will be let come!"

"Oh, I've my plan." Rhona's light eyes sparkled wickedly. "People here want waking up. They're kept in cotton-wool. Eyes bunged up and ears stuffed. What they want is—to see and hear. Well, a few of 'em are doing it. That," she nodded knowingly at d'Asnay, "is where my Distinguished Visitors come in."

The lips under the fiercely-waxed moustaches smiled. Margot liked the look of this officer of the Belgian General Staff, with the savage eyes and the smooth olive skin, the pointed chestnut beard, fiercely-waxed moustache, and the cool, polite manner. He wore the uniform of the Belgian Chasseurs à Cheval, and the vulture-plumes of his high shako were cut and broken and scorched in places, the gold braiding of his dark blue tunic was tarnished and weather-beaten, and the grey, blue-striped overalls and spurred black knee-boots were rusty with old mud and white with new dust. "You're from the Front?" she queried, as she moved with Rhona and the Belgian towards the glass swing-doors, giving access from the vestibule to the Club's big ground-floor drawing-room.

He answered:

"There are several Fronts—and I have the honour to come from one of them, Madame."

"With dispatches?"

"Possibly with dispatches, Madame!" He answered with an amused side-glance at the small, vivacious face. "Though there are swifter methods of transmitting intelligence than by entrusting letters to a messenger's hands."

As he moved beside her, courteously replying, she saw the crimson and green enamelled, purple-ribboned Cross of the Belgian Order of Leopold shining upon the dark blue tunic-breast.

"How are—things—getting on? Nobody tells us anything," twittered the humming-bird. "We might live at the North Pole."

"Madame might find even at the North Pole compensations for the low temperature and the lack of society." The vulture-plumes on the dark blue shako nodded as he turned his face to her. "In the fact that there are no Boches there," he added, and the smile that had curved the soldierly moustache vanished as though the word had wiped it from his mouth.

"Do tell me what are Boches?" Margot begged, kindling to interest. He answered with an intensity that dug deep lines at the angles of his nostrils, and puckered the corners of the eyes that burned under his frowning brows:

"They are a nation of beings, Madame, that are no longer men!"

"Germans you mean, don't you?" she asked after a little pause of bewilderment, staring with shocked, dilated eyes at the left side of d'Asnay's close-cropped head, now revealed to her as he removed his shako, and standing a little in advance of the two women, held back with the thrust of his broad shoulders a leaf of the drawing-room swing-doors. The four-inch square of white surgical plaster adhering to a place whence the chestnut-brown hair had been shaven, showed the outline of a deep, jagged gash. "You are hurt! You have had some awful accident! . . . Was it a motor-smash? Doesn't it pain you?" Kittums asked breathlessly. For d'Asnay had touched the surgical strapping with his gloved hand, and his smiling face had winced.

"It is nothing, Madame," he assured her, "and it was not caused by an accident. It is merely a whiff of *schrapnel*—a love-gift from *Messieurs les Boches.*"

"You are *wounded?*"

"Madame, that is what one calls it, when one suffers *à coup d'obus.* They are common, these little tokens, on our

side of the North Sea. Mine has procured me a visit to London, and the pleasure of meeting you."

She looked at him like a grieved child, and her lips so quivered that he softened to her behind the crinkles of his smiling bearded mask.

"You speak like this because you think I am heartless and indifferent. Perhaps I have been—until to-day! We are so far from things. We see nothing. And we hear so little about the War!"

"Alas, Madame!" came the answer. "Forgive the cruel prophecy, that the moment approaches when you will hear too much!"

The swing-doors thudded behind them like guns at a great distance. The capacious ground-floor drawing-room, not usually crowded before luncheon, was thronged nearly to the walls. A vacant space in the centre presumably accommodated the Distinguished Visitors. But between these and Margot's quickening curiosity intervened a solid wall of backs.

The Distinguished Visitors must be Royalties, decided Margot, as she skirted the barrier, looking right and left for a peephole, recognising the vast back of Sir Thomas Brayham, the skeleton back of the Goblin, the willowy back of Trixie Wastwood, the backs of Lady Beauvayse, Cynthia Charterhouse, Tota Stannus, and Patrine Saxham with other backs pertaining to divers dear friends, consolidated into the rampart of humanity over which the towering feathers of Vanity Fair nodded and bobbed and waved.

"They're taking it in," Margot heard Rhona mutter, behind her. "'*Somebody's playing off a joke on us*,' would be the first thing that'd come into their blessed heads. Well!—let 'em think what they choose. Ask me why I did it, Comte, and I swear I couldn't tell you. Blue murder! how my arms ache. But so must yours. You nursed the biggest of the babies all the way from Ostend to Charing Cross."

"Mademoiselle is right!" The swift, fierce undertone was d'Asnay's. "They do not comprehend yet. Not yet!" He breathed hissingly through his nose. "Wait—and presently the Truth will leap at them and strike them *entre les yeux*. But a place must be found for the friend of Mademoiselle!" He came noiselessly to the side of Margot. "A chair, so. A footstool, so. Madame will step on the one and mount to the other. Permit, Madame, that I offer my assistance! Now Madame commands an excellent view of—shall I call it—the spectacle?"

The speaker's voice was drowned in an outburst of strident music. Barely two doors from the Club the piano-organ had broken out with "*La Barbançonne*." And as the walls vibrated to its shrill cries of triumph, and the wild disonances of a joy that touches frenzy, the cracked but vigorous tenor began to sing:

"Après des siècles, des siècles d'esclavage
Le Belge sortant du tombeau
A reconquis par son courage
Son nom, son droit et son drapeau.
Et ta main souveraine et fière
Peuple désormais indompte
Grava sur ta vielle bannière
Le roi, la Loi, la Liberté!"

"*Sapristi!* It is strange that!" d'Asnay muttered at the first bars. "Mademoiselle Helvellyn devised the tableau, certainly, but who arranged the *entr'acte?*"

The shrill, unbearable frenzy of the piano-organ abated, the voice of the singer was more plainly heard. It chanted in thin nasal tones, with missed-out notes in each bar that were like gaps where teeth had been in an old sorrowful singing mouth:

*"O Belgique, O mère chérie,*
*A toi nos cœurs, à toi nos bras,*
*A toi notre sang, O Patrie——"*

While Margot, a-tiptoe on her chair, peered through the screen of towering feathers at the Club's Distinguished Visitors,—wondering that within the wall of absorbed faces there should be so little to attract or interest. Nothing more intriguing than the homely figure of a Flemish peasant woman, with four young children huddled round her, and a baby at her breast.

## CHAPTER LVII

### THE BELGIAN WIFE

DESOLATE advance-guard of the vast army so soon to invade the shores of Britain, how familiar the figure is now that was then so strange to us in the quaint old-world fashion of its homely garments, the thick white dust and travel-stains that covered it, from the linen coif to the wooden shoes.

She was not old, the woman who sat with her little flock gathered about her, on the Indian stool that had supported the superb person of von Herrnung, what time he had held forth to Mrs. Charterhouse and Lady Wastwood upon the loftiness of German Kultur, the perfection of German female beauty, and the overwhelming mental and bodily superiority of the German Superman. A Walloon peasant from a village near Jodoigne where she and her husband had worked upon a tiny farm.

Perhaps a dozen words of French were hers: "*Tout brûlé!*" and "*En Angleterre où il n'y a pas de Boches!*"

We were to learn to reap terrible meanings from that hoarse, faint parrot-cry. Truths that raised the hairs upon the flesh and chilled the blood were to be imaged for us in the blank vacuity of her unseeing stare. We were to learn why all her children squinted, from Vic, the sturdy man of seven, and Josephine, his junior, possibly by a year, down to Georgette of the chubby cheeks and crinkly, roguish eyelids, and Albert, of the round blue stare, the big white-haired head, and the marvellous bow legs.

In their dull stunned quietude and their clayey pallor, the mark of the Beast was branded upon them, down to the livid baby in its little cap of soiled linen, swaddled in the old

red shawl, that bound down its arms. You might have thought it dead, but for the flutter of a muscle in the cheek, and the faint movement of its lips, feebly sucking at the breast that had been large and bounteous, and now was lax, and flabby, covered by a network of darkish violet veins.

*"Who are they? . . . What are they? . . . Where do they come from? . . . Why were they brought here? . . . Does no one know? . . . Will no one tell? . . ."*

The silence of amazement was now breaking. The mouths belonging to the faces under the nodding feathers, old and young, handsome and ugly, vacuous and clever, silly and intellectual, were all prattling interrogations like the above. Pride of Place and Joy of Life, Thirst of Pleasure, Lust of Power, Gaiety and Weariness, Wisdom and Folly, Humbug and Sincerity, Meanness and Generosity, ringed-in the dusty group of wooden-shod mysteries and most frightfully wanted to know! And nobody offered any solution of the puzzle. The piano-organ was playing half a dozen doors below the Club, the cracked old tenor quavering to its accompaniment:

*"Nous le jurons tu vivras!*
*Tu vivras toujours grande et belle*
*Et ton invincible unité*
*Aura pour devise immortelle——"*

The music suddenly broke off. A policeman had ordered the organ to move on. . . .

*"Tout brûlé!"*

Hitherto the Belgian woman had not looked up, nor changed her listless attitude. Now she lifted her empty expressionless eyes, and hoarsely iterated her parrot-cry. The suckling at her breast whimpered and let go the nipple. She glanced at it, saying in her own thick Flemish tongue:

*"Daar is geen melk."*[1]

[1] "There is no milk."

She rocked the baby for whom she had no milk. Its feeble whimper was not stilled. She went on to that accompaniment:

"*De Duischer kwamen. Zy hebben alles gebrand! De geburen,—mijn vader—mijn man is gedood! Zy hebben hem in het vuur geworpen!*"[1]

The baby's whimper became a wail of feeble protest. It fought and struggled frantically under the old red swathing shawl. The shawl loosened, slid to the floor, and the wizened arms rose free and jerking. One arm, tightly bandaged below the elbow, ended in a raw and bloody stump. She regarded it with her drained-out stare, not trying to replace the strappings that had bound it, saying in the heavy voice of a sleep-walker:

"*Dees ook hebben ze gedaan. God sta ons bij!*"[2]

And sobs and weeping broke out around her, as though that little handless arm had been a veritable rod of Moses bringing water from the living rock. But no sigh lifted her bosom, nor were her dry eyelids moistened with the dew of tears. Prussian militarism had wrought its work upon her. She and hers had been trodden as grapes in the Hohenzollern winepress. Those emptied eyes had seen things done that might well make devils laugh in Hell.

The Club walls vanished away as we looked, and behind that stricken figure spread the devastated plains of Belgium, the Sorrowful, the Glorious, who has endured agony and shame unutterable, that her neighbours might go free. We had a vision of the Son of Man descending in a blood-red, rainy dawning, and heard Him saying to the apostles of German Kultur:

[1] "The Germans came. They burned everything. The neighbours, and my father, and my husband are dead. They threw them into the fire."

[2] "This too they did. od help us!"

"*Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these . . . ye have done it unto Me!*"

And not a woman among us who had a man with the British Expedition, but prayed in her soul, fervently:

"Vengeance is Thine, for Thou hast said it. But make *him* Thy scourge, O Lord!"

## CHAPTER LVIII

### SHERBRAND BUYS THE LICENCE

THE spell of silence was broken. Excitement seethed as Patrine escaped out of the crush in the drawing-room and returned to the vestibule. There, subsiding into one of the tall-backed chairs beside the table that held the Members' Register and Visitors' Book, she waited, hoping against hope that the tall figure in khaki might reappear under the Club portico.

"Patrine!"

"Oh, Alan!—you came back after all!"

Her gloom changed to radiancy. She rose up as the tall figure of Sherbrand passed under the portico, and hurried to him, emptying her budget of regrets. "I've behaved like a cad. Do forgive me! Don't be wrathy. But you can't be—or you'd never have come back."

"You dear, it's all right!" He caught the outstretched hands in both his and wrung them. "Forget—and let's be happy." The truth about Bawne tugged at him as he said the words, but he had determined not to torture her with that horror. He went on, with the frankness that she found so lovable, "I was vexed, but it was idiotic of me not to have told you about the Commission before."

"And the man. Your French sossifer," she went on, "who looked at me as though I ought to live in a cage at the Zoo? What must he have thought of your taste in young women? What mustn't he have said when he got you out of the way?"

"Oh, not much!"

"Go on. Rub it in!"

"Well then"—Sherbrand's mouth was steady, but the

laughter in his eyes was not to be controlled—"he saw I was fearfully sick at your having shown temper before him. And he told me not to be chagrined because a handsome woman had made me a little drama."

"F'ff!" She winced and set her teeth on her crimson underlip. "He knew I'd ask and you'd tell me. He saw me —squirming—in his mind's eye. Oh! and how he's hit me off. For I *was* awfully like the heavy leading lady of a tin travelling theatre-company. Aren't you ashamed of me? Don't you loathe me?" she wooed with entreating eyes.

"Frightfully. Tell me—where can we have a cosy talk together? I've got a whole hour before I'm due at Hendon," he said.

"The Rose-and-Green Divan—but there are sure to be people smoking there. Oh!—I know. The Little Library. Nobody ever goes in, and it's got a door opening into the Divan. Friends of Members aren't admitted into the Library—but if you're caught there—you say you were coming out of the Divan, where outsiders *are* allowed—and opened the wrong door—do you switch on?"

He nodded, repressing the desire to ask in whose company she had been caught there, and followed the tall lithe figure down a short corridor leading to the back of the ground-floor. The corridor ended in the Little Library, a studious apartment of bathing-machine dimensions, walled with curiously new-appearing books of information and reference, and containing two small writing-tables, each supported by a rosewood-stained Windsor, a brace of baskets, and two deep, cushiony, Rothmore chairs. A Member of mature years and mountainous proportions slept placidly in one of these, with Whitaker's Peerage balanced at a perilous angle on the vanishing indications of what must once have been her lap. The subdued murmur of voices trickled in from the adjoining smoking-room with vaporous wisps of Turkish and Virginia. Save for the stout slumbering Member the lovers were beautifully alone.

"Good! Oh, boy!—to have got you back again," Patrine said breathlessly after their kiss. She dropped down noiselessly into the springy embraces of the vacant Rothmore, and Sherbrand smiling, perched upon the chair's broad arm.

"This is an unbecoming contrast—isn't it?" She leaned her beech-leaf tinted head against the plastron of the khaki tunic as his strong hand crept behind her supple waist. "But I don't care, I can't think of anything but you, Alan. When do you start to-morrow, and from where? I suppose you mustn't tell me?" She sighed, rubbing her cheek against him as the strong arm embraced and held her. "Oh me! What it is to be the sweetheart of a soldier. Why—*Alan!*"

She lifted her head and looked at him, frowning, and her long eyes were black between the narrowed lids. "Do you know how your heart jumped when I said 'soldier'? Does it mean as much to you as all that?"

He began to stammer a little.

"Oh—well!—you see—we Sherbrands have worn the King's coat for ages. Ever since there were any Sherbrands—going by the portraits in the gallery at Whins—where my father lived when he was a boy. He used to describe them to me until I knew them as well as he did from the Sir Alan who fought with Talbot against the French at Castillan Chatillon as a boy, and got killed at Bannockburn thirty-five years later, down to the jolly old Sir Roger, who fought like a Trojan at Badajoz. He was my great-grandfather, so I suppose I've always had a secret hankering for the Service. Like the inherited nostalgia Hillmen's children have for the mountains, or sailors' for the sea. The kind of feeling that sets the little Arctic foxes in the Zoo howling at the first sprinkle of snow in December. Only I knew I mustn't yield to it. You know the reason why!"

"You told me, and I answered that that kind of reason couldn't affect you."

"Now you shall hear a plan I've been nursing." His arm again engirdled her. "Do you know Seasheere? It's a little grassy, cliffy, shingly village on the South-East coast, three-hours' journey from Charing Cross. There's a Naval Air Station there that was a Seaplane School not long ago. We used to send 'em pupils from Hendon: there's a cottage where they take lodgers not far off. I spent three weeks there last summer, fishing and motor-boating when I wasn't making friends with Goody Two Shoes——"

"Who's Goody Two Shoes?"

"The hydroplane!" His voice broke in laughter. "Did you think I meant a girl?"

"I'm an idiot. Go on about your plan, dear."

"Oh—well! The cottage I stayed at was jolly comfortable, and the landlady the tidiest old woman that ever grilled a chop. Now suppose—to-morrow, or a week, or two months hence you got a wire from Somewhere in France or Belgium saying: '*Seasheere—such-a-day-and-such-an-hour—Alan*'—would you pack your kit for a week-end and hop into the train, and come?"

"Without asking—without telling—Aunt Lynette or Uncle Owen?" She asked the question breathlessly.

"We'll tell the Doctor and Mrs. Saxham directly afterwards." He leaned his cheek on the beech-leaf hair and his arm tightened about her waist possessively. "You said my heart jumped just now when you called me a soldier. How it will jump when I pick you out with the glasses, a tiny black speck on the cliffs at Seasheere, waiting with the sunset behind you, or the dawn in your eyes to welcome me back from over the sea. Oh, my girl!"—his voice wooed her irresistibly—"I've dreamed wide awake of the joy of such a greeting. . . . It's up to you to make my dream come true!" He kissed her hair. "And we'll watch the day die, and sup together, and you'll sleep at my nice old woman's cottage. And I'll turn in at the Air Station—and

next morning we'll be married at Seasheere Catholic Church!"

"Married—that's your plan? Ah, Alan! shall we ever be married?" she sighed.

He laughed softly, pressing her against him.

"The little Catholic Church I've mentioned was built for the very purpose. Perched on the cliffs as though it might spread its rafters any minute and flap away to sea." He kissed her hair again. "Don't think I'm spinning fairy-tales. I've got a Special Licence, so there's no need to bother about time, or previous residence in the district, or anything stuffy. Nothing's wanted but Opportunity, the church, and the priest. And that the local Registrar should put in an appearance. That's necessary, as we're not of the same faith—yet!"

She freed herself from his embrace, rose to her superb height, and stood over him.

"You've arranged all this—without consulting me for a minute. You and your landlady—and your Licence and your Registrar! Boy, I am sensible of a great desire to box your ears soundly for this!"

"I'd rather take a clout from you than a kiss from any other woman."

She tapped him lightly on both ears, and said, putting a butterfly touch of lips in the middle of the broad, tanned brow:

"There are both clout and kiss. Now show me the Special Licence."

He thrust his hand into a pocket behind the plastron of the khaki tunic and pulled out a note-case she had bought and given him. The shiny square of parchment-paper bearing the signature of his Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury drew both their heads together over it. In a compartment meant for stamps was a hard, thin, metallic circle, shining yellow through tissue paper folds.

"The—Ring?" she whispered.

"The Ring!" He nodded, smiling, as she bent her face over it, kissed the tissue paper reverently, stuck the Licence back in its compartment, and gave him back the case.

"And you had these in your pocket this afternoon when I was such a horrid beast to you?"

"They were burning a hole right into my chest. Why, Pat, you're—crying!"

She half turned away, mopping her wet eyes with her flimsy little handkerchief.

"Because—because—it's so blessedly sweet and dear of you to have planned this. Do you—do you really want it so much?"

"More than anything under the sky," said Sherbrand. "And, don't you see, it settles the question of providing for you, splendidly! If we're married, and I get—pipped—Somewhere at the Front—" He stopped short, for one of her large hands firmly covered his mouth.

"I won't have it. You're not to speak like that, ever!" said a muffled voice above his head. "If you were killed—don't you understand—everything'd be over for me! It's a kind of nasty little Death—only to have you hint at it."

"All right!" he mumbled penitently, and kissed the hand. It was withdrawn, and he went on:

"I have my little fortune, though Flying has made a hole in it. And I'd naturally like—as my mother is provided for—the stuff to go to my wife."

"Oh! if I only were—good enough, I would be your wife to-morrow!" she groaned.

He got up and took her masterfully in his arms.

"No more of that. I can't stick being made out a—bally pattern. You are a hundred times too good for me!"

"*But not at all patriotic,*" came drifting back upon him in the voice of Raymond. His embrace never slackened, but he asked of her a question, looking for the answer to lighten in her eyes: "Pat—you've not said yet that you're glad they've given me my Flying Commission!—that you're

British enough to give your man, if it came to giving—for the Old Shop! I know you are!—of course you are!—but say it—I'd like to hear you."

"I—I——" She caught her breath and her eyes wavered miserably under his steady gaze. "I'm not a little bit o' good at telling decent proper lies. I love England—but I love you heaps, heaps, *heaps* best!" He felt her pant between his arms. . . . She writhed her long white neck like a creature in desperate agony. "I want to eat my cake and have it!" she wailed, evading his eyes. "Now you know me, you'll despise me. But it's the truth—anyway! I'd like a man to send to the War—and a man to keep for myself!"

His arms wrapped her closely and his heart plunged madly against her bosom. He kissed her on her yielded mouth, and the kiss was a living flame.

"That will be when we are married and you have a son!" he whispered, and a drowning horror enveloped her. She cried out and thrust him back, and might have sunk down at his feet and told her dreadful story then. . . .

Whitaker's Peerage intervened, sliding from the lap of the obese, reposeful Member, and falling to the carpet with a resounding thump. The indignant eyes of the awakened lady glared at Sherbrand over her gold-rimmed spectacles. She demanded, snorting:

"Since when has this room—*hr'runk!*—been thrown open to visitors?"

"I'll inquire," Sherbrand stammered, and the guilty couple fled. That night Patrine wrote on a card "Seasheere," and thenceafter wore it in her bosom. But many weeks were over her head before the Call came.

## CHAPTER LIX

### THE WOE-WAVE BREAKS

MEANWHILE everybody who could get near the Belgian refugees excitedly pressed hospitality upon them. . . . The desolate mother was termed "Poor Dear" in a dozen different keys of sympathy. But she only looked with dull vague eyes in the faces of would-be philanthropists. When kindly hands tried to draw the little ones away, she grabbed them and held on.

"She doesn't understand us, the Poor Dear Creature!" Thus the Goblin, gulping within her rows of pearls, red-eyed under her towering osprey *panache*. "What she has suffered! It shatters one to realise. Can one credit that dear Count Tido could have belonged to such a race? Miss Helvellyn claims her by right of discovery, I believe, so farewell to my plans for her benefit! But Belgians, I understand, are to be had in any quantity, and Belgians I must and will have! Think of those rows and *rows* of new cottages standing empty at Wathe Regis, and that huge caravanserai that nobody can live in at the corner of Russell Square! Do you hear me, Sir Thomas? Oh, how *clever* of you, Lady Eliason! Sir Thomas, listen! Lady Eliason *positively promises* that Sir Solomon shall interest himself in this. *Of course* there must be a Fund, and a Committee, and a Headquarters! The Fund must be Huge, the Committee Representative. . . . Dear Lady Beauvayse is to be our Hon. Secretary. . . . With your legal knowledge and influence, and your passion for philanthropy, Sir Thomas, don't tell me You are going to keep out of this! You are damned if you do! did you say? Bless you! Who *are* these queer people coming in?"

Two nuns in the familiar habit worn by Roman Catholic Sisters of Charity, little black-robed figures with starched white coifs, broad white guimpes and flowing black veils, had passed the Club windows a moment previously. A tall, slight woman in Quaker grey had seen and hurried in pursuit of the Sisters, recognised as members of a Belgian Community, to whom Mrs. Saxham explained the situation, speaking in her exquisite French. The Sisters replied in a less polished accent, their discreet eyes ignoring curious glances as their guide ushered them into the crowded drawing-room.

The crowd parted before them, revealing Rachel and her children. The nuns moved forwards and stood within the radius of those heavy, vacant eyes. Life leaped into them. She cried out in her thick Flemish tongue and was answered, and rose up, the children clinging to her. In a moment the Sisters had advanced upon her, taken the baby from the cramped arms that now resigned it, taken the mother also into a pair of black-sleeved arms. And she was weeping on the bosom of Charity, and telling them the dreadful story that is told anew every day. Presently she and Vic, Josephine, Georgette, and Albert the big-headed, were eating cake and drinking coffee under the sheltering wing of the Sisters, but though some elderly Members still hovered in their neighbourhood, the question of a Fund and a Committee had usurped the attention of the Club.

Lady Eliason and Lady Wathe were selecting a Quorum. . . . Rhona Helvellyn had proposed to Lynette an adjournment to the Chintz Room. They had reached the swing-doors of the drawing-room, when with violence they banged open to admit Brenda Helvellyn in the maddest spirits, escorted by Doda Foltlebarre and Sissi Eliason and half a dozen of the wilder, younger members of the Club.

Said Rhona, barring her junior's way with a long thin arm as Brenda rollicked past her:

"Mrs. Saxham, let me introduce my sister Brenda. Brenda admires you frightfully!"

Brenda, staring with wide bright eyes at the object of her alleged admiration, offered a pink, moist, recently washed hand to Lynette. At Rhona's indignant exclamation she started and pulled away the hand, stammering:

"They wouldn't let me! . . ."

"Wouldn't let you change into decent clothes when I'd 'phoned Home to have some sent here? Tell me another!"

"Well, then, the things hadn't come!"

"And if they haven't, why not have stayed upstairs until they do come?"

"All alone. . . . Oh! I couldn't! Anything awful might happen up there. . . ." The peach-face of sixteen winced and the eyebrows puckered. "And Doda and Sissi simply *love* me in these things. They said I must come down and be seen!"

Doda and Sissi and the guilty six exchanged rapturous winks and grimaces. Certainly a damsel of sixteen, whose superb crimson tresses are crowned with the squashed ruin of a muslin "Trouville" hat, and whose slender form is draped in the wilted wraith of a light green aquascutum, is more than likely to create a *succès fou*, on her appearance in a London drawing-room.

"'Seen!'" Rhona snorted. "Well, you are a sight, there's no denying. From your head to your feet— My merry Christmas! what *have* you got on your feet?"

Brenda tittered nervously, poking out a slim foot in a huge golosh lined with wearied red flannel.

"They're the Mère Économe's. There wasn't time to dress properly. We were turned out of the Convent, haven't I told you!—just as we stood. It was early in the morning. Seven o'clock Mass was just over. We were trooping in to the *Réfectoire* for coffee. We went to Mass and did our lessons, in spite of the awful guns. Then . . . all at once—" She began to laugh, and a mask of fine glittering dew broke out over her peachy face from the temples to the upper lip. "The earth began to shake.

The French were retreating from Charleroi. They streamed past and past, horsemen and guns and marching men, just as they'd gone by two days before when we waved and cheered them from the garden. Only this time there were wounded men. . . . The ambulance waggons were heaped with them—all bloody and dreadful. . . . Oh! And then the shells began to fall . . . among the waggons and on the Convent! "The Germans are coming," the soldiers called to us. 'Fly while you have time!'"

"Shut up!" Rhona ordered the girl. "Haven't I told you not to talk, you stoopid! There weren't any shells—it's all your silly nerves. There might have been—but there weren't!"

"But the shells were hitting the Convent walls . . . and bursting. The house was on fire. And the French Commandant said to the *Maitresse Générale:* 'It will be *rasé* over your heads if you remain, Madame. *On n'y fait quartier à personne—les Allemands!* They are advancing in incredible numbers. The road to Calais lies open before them because of the Great Catastrophe of yesterday. Our hearts are sad, not only for our own losses, but for the misfortunes of our friends across the——'"

"Will you be silent! He never said so!"

With her scarlet head surmounting the shiny waterproof, Brenda rather reminded one of a Green Hackle, the likeness to the splendid gauze-winged fly being increased by the brightness of her eyes. Very round, very wide open, and with strange lines radiating from the pin-point speck of pupil to the outer band ringing the hazel irids, they stared from that crystal-beaded mask of hers. "But, Rhona," she reiterated, bewildered by her senior's vehemence of contradiction, "he *did* say so! And the Convent was burning when we left!"

"If it was, you're to forget it—d'you hear me? And look here, if you dare to talk like this at home——"

"I won't. I know the Mater mustn't be upset! Look

here, I'll swear I won't, if that'll do! Only don't say I've got to stop upstairs, will you? They're so gay here," Brenda pleaded humbly—"it'll help me to forget!"

"All right!" and with a warning scowl from Rhona the sisters parted. Lynette Saxham asked, looking after the little bizarre figure of Brenda with wistful tenderness in her eyes:

"Will she recover from the shock of the horrors she has seen the more quickly because you forbid her to speak of them?"

"I don't know. . . . I haven't thought. . . . It's my mother I bother most about. . . . You see, Roddy's Battery—Roddy's my brother—has gone with the Expedition. If Brenda talks rawhead and bloody-bones—but I'll take care she don't, the little fool!"

The eyes of both women followed the funny little figure. Lynette said as it was absorbed in a crowd of laughing friends:

"Would you prefer that we finished our talk here?" She glanced at the settee in a glass-screened angle near the fireplace, and Rhona assented with evident relief. Her Chiefs of the W.S.S.S., she explained, were anxious that Mrs. Saxham should consent to speak at the Royal Hall Mass Meeting of Protest Against the Delay of Parliament in passing the Woman Suffrage Bill. The Meeting was fixed for the middle of October. Mrs. Saxham's sympathy with the Movement was to be gathered from her writings. A personal expression would be valued by the W.S.S.S.

"I am in sympathy to the extent of joining in any form of protest or any description of organised Demonstration that is not characterised by violence," said Lynette. "To brawl at public meetings"—Rhona wondered whether she had heard of her own baulked attempt to heckle the Bishops at the Guildhall Banquet?—"to assault public personages and damage private or public property is not the method by which the Franchise will be gained. To make war upon

men is not the way, I think, to win their suffrages for women. But I will gladly speak at the Meeting, please be kind enough to tell the Chiefs."

"It's awfully sporting of you—when you've been in such trouble. It must have been quite too awful," bungled Rhona, "about your boy!"

"About my boy! . . ." Lynette caught her breath and nipped her lower lip between her teeth to keep back the cry that else must have escaped her. "You are kind. . . . You will be infinitely kinder if you say no more!"

"I beg your pardon. I'm frightfully clumsy!" apologised Rhona. "Roddy—my brother who's at the Front—once told me that I had the tact of a steam-cultivator and the discretion of a runaway motor-bus." She added: "I'm afraid you think I was rough on Brenda. But the Mater's heart-trouble keeps us all on tenterhooks, and for her sake—no matter what horrors are hinted or whispered—nothing shall make me believe—anything but the Best, until the Worst is brought to my door! You understand, don't you? . . . What's that? Young Brenda——"

A gust of laughter drew the eyes of both women to the Green Hackle, who, surrounded by an appreciative circle, including Margot and Trixie Wastwood, Cynthia Charterhouse, Doda and Sissi, was performing the maddest *pas seul* that ever held the floor. One huge golosh flew off, shaving a gilt-and-crystal electrolier as she finished with a daring high kick, and dropped down breathless and panting between Margot and Cynthia Charterhouse.

"You crazy child!" cooed Mrs. Charterhouse, patting one of the pink hands.

"I feel crazy!" gurgled Brenda, while Doda picked up her battered Trouville hat and Sissi retrieved hairpins scattered over the Club carpet. "Oh, my stars! You don't know, you'll none of you ever guess what it is to me to find you all so gay!" She bounced on the springy seat until her red locks tossed like the mane of a Shetland pony. "Now I

really can believe—really!—that the whole thing's been a bad dream! Like you get when Sisters have been too busy to boil the potatoes soft, or take the cores out of the stewed apples." She turned her head and the sparkling mask of tiny beads broke out again over her flushed face. "Who are those *Sœurs de Charité?*" she asked, for the circle of elderly Members had melted away and the two Religious were now going, taking with them the Belgian mother and her children, to whom—of course at the Club's expense—they were to afford a temporary home. "What are they here for? Why, that's the woman who came with us on the boat from Ostend! Ah, my God!—it's all true! I can't tell lies any more! Do you hear, Rhona?" and the bizarre little figure leaped up and stood before them, defiant and panting. "Not even for you and Mother!" The voice broke in a wail. "Oh! how can you bear to see everyone so gay when the Guards and Gunners have been killed at Mons? Seven thousand lying dead, the French Commandant told us. Thousands taken prisoners—and we sit laughing here——"

Lynette Saxham caught the little body as it doubled on itself and dropped like a shot rabbit. She carried it to one of the settees, and knelt by it, loosening the clothes, working with swift and motherly hands.

The piano-organ had come back, or another like it,—and was jolting out the popular pseudo-pathetic strains of "Good-bye, Little Girl, Good-bye!" The swing-doors had thudded behind the nuns and their charges. Lady Wathe was just saying to Lady Eliason:

"Then you, dear, will personally apply to the Foreign Office and the Home Office and the Belgian Ambassador and the County Council. Pray count on me for *all* the rest! Sir Solomon is a Tower of Strength! You agree with me, don't you, Sir Thomas? Mercy on us! *What* a commotion! Who has had a telegram from the Front? Who says the Guards and Gunners have been annihilated? Who says the British Expedition has been overwhelmed by numbers and

forced to Retreat? Will nobody stop that horrible organ? Will nobody answer me?"

It was the tragic crowning of that day of trivial happenings that the Iron Curtain that had baffled us so persistently should rise to the tune of a music-hall ballad at the touch of a schoolgirl's hand. Long before the huge funeral broadsheets broke out in the gutters of Fleet Street, the Strand, Pall Mall, and Piccadilly, screaming of the RETIREMENT OF THE FRENCH FORCES FROM NAMUR AND CHARLEROI, DISASTER TO THE BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY ARMY, DECIMATION OF FAMOUS REGIMENTS, AND THE RETREAT FROM MONS, the Tidal Wave of Mourning that was to sweep the United Kingdom from end to end had crashed down upon the Club.

Ah! how one had underrated them, those dead men who, living, had seemed to hold themselves so lightly. Who, submitting to be outclassed in Sport even while holding it the thing best worth living for, had smilingly accepted those hateful records of 1912–1913.

Theirs is a glorious record now. Above the huge Roll that is wreathed with bloodstained laurels, droop the Flags of the Allied Nations, their heavy folds all gemmed with bitter tears. Each nightfall finds the endless Roll grown longer. Each day-dawn sees the Hope of noble houses, the pride and stay of homes gentle and simple swallowed up in the abyss that is never glutted! How long, O Lord? we cry, yet comes no nearer the End for which the smallest children pray.

And the women. . . . In the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel we read of a valley of dry bones over which the Spirit of the Creator breathed. When that Wind from Heaven stirred them, the dead white bones put on Life and rose up. A change as miraculous has been wrought in Woman since the Black Deluge left a deposit of new-made widows and

mourning mothers, red-eyed sisters and silent wan-faced sweethearts, sitting about the little tables where the empty places showed as awful gaps.

The bereaved did not shed many tears. Their grief was too deep to be emotional, their newly-awakened spirit too lofty for complaint. Their pride in their dead men was their upholding. Their bleeding hearts they only showed to GOD. Before then, He was for many of us non-existent: for many more a remote, passively observant Personality but tepidly interested in the affairs of the human race. Would these have learned to know Him, think you, if there had been no War?

And those whom every newspaper unfolded, every knock at the door might smite with dire intelligence, right bravely they bore themselves through that fortnight-long, hideous pipe-dream of the Long Retreat South. For many of these the torture of suspense was to give place to cruel certainty, after that unforgettable Sunday of the Sixth September, when at a distance of twelve kilometres from Paris the retirement of the Allied Armies suddenly changed to an Advance, and the columns of German Guard Uhlans in hot pursuit of the British Force, were routed by Generals Gough and Chetwode with our 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades. For many, many others, the strain has never since slackened. They lie o' nights as they lay through those nights of September, 1914, and feel the bed shaking, and the floors and walls vibrating, as the outer rings of vast concussions spread to them through the troubled ocean of atmosphere. And in the mornings they will tell you calmly:

"Oh, yes. *He* is alive, but where he is there is terrible fighting. I heard the guns." . . .

No arguments of people whose sons or husbands are not with the Army in Belgium, or France, Italy, or Palestine, will convince them that they do not hear the guns. Or that, borne upon the waves of a subtler medium than air are not conveyed to them finer, more mysterious vibrations.

Thoughts that meet thoughts. Mental appeals—demands —entreaties. . . . The hands of their souls, reaching out through the dark hours, clasp those of other souls in greetings and farewells.

## CHAPTER LX

### KULTUR!

THE Belgian village-town had been so sorely knocked about that the names of its faubourgs, boulevards, and thoroughfares were obliterated. Hence, one is fain to substitute others, such as the Street Where The Naked Body Of The Little Girl Hung Up On Hooks In the Butcher's Window, the Passage Of The Three Dead British Soldiers With Slit Noses And Pounded Feet,—The Square Of The Forty Blindfolded Civilian Corpses, and the Place Of The Church Of The Curé They Crucified For Warning The British By Ringing The Bells. Of this sacred edifice—Romanesque and dating from the tenth century—little remained beyond the crypt and the stump of the tower. Some calcined and twisted bones, a scorched rag of a cassock, represented M. le Curé, that faithful shepherd of souls. Of M. le Curé's flock, not one remained to tell the story of the tragic episode that had reared the grim pile of blackening corpses in the Market Square, and added seven hundred homeless refugees to the rivers of human wretchedness ceaselessly rolling South.

In the bright sunshine of the fine October morning that had followed a night of rain and thunder, the grimly-altered shadows of shell-torn buildings lay black on the ripped-up pavements and shrapnel-pocked walls. A sandy-white cat lapped gratefully at a puddle, a dishevelled fowl pecked between the cobblestones, a pigeon or two preened on the broken ridge-tiles. To the eye of a skilled observer hovering hawk-like in the hot blue heavens, raking the streets through high-powered Zeiss binoculars, nothing human remained alive in this Aceldama. Yet when the two-seated bomb-

carrying Taube with the big man and the small boy in it had banked and climbed, and hummed away Southwards on its aërial mission of ruin and destruction, one British officer, sorely wounded, lay in what had been the ground-floor living-room of a well-to-do baker's shop.

A Captain of a Guards infantry battalion belonging to a Brigade of the First Division of the First Army Corps. Marching, counter-marching, digging, and fighting rear-guard actions had kept the Brigade's hands full during those blazing days and drenching nights of August and September, whilst the battered Divisions that had borne the brunt of the huge German offensive, reduced to one-twentieth of their effective, had hurried Southwards, leaving a trail of blood.

"Those other beggars have had all the luck!" the Brigade had growled when it had any time for growling. But it had won shining honours at the Marne, and had been heavily engaged at the Aisne, losing many of its men and officers. In the Aisne battle, particularly, the man we are concerned with had won special mention in Dispatches for a deed of great gallantry. Three days previously, an order from General Headquarters had moved his battalion on the little village town.

Their R.F.A. Battery had been posted a quarter-mile distant, commanding the north-east and east where the Germans were known to be. Machine-guns were placed at the principal road-ends debouching on the west where the Germans might be: the main streets had been barricaded with transport-waggons and motor-lorries, all the Maxims left had been hidden behind the sand-bagged windows of a factory—a gaunt, brick sky-scraper, long a thorn to the beauty-loving eye of M. le Curé—the walls of houses ending streets leading to the country had been loopholed for musketry, and a howitzer from the battery and a machine-gun

had been spared to protect the bridge south of the town, a little place resting in the elbow of a small babbling river. Watches and patrols had been set and pickets placed, and then these war-worn Britons had dispersed into billets, or gone into barracks, too weary to eat, craving only for sleep. . . . That big mound of blackened ruins near the railway station, left intact for strategic purposes by the enemy, now stood for the barracks—just as that calcined heap of masonry, and twisted iron girders at the town's north angle now represented the hospital. Both had blazed, two huge, unquenchable, incendiary-shell-kindled pyres, to light the retreat of the battalion south.

Secure on those points of menace, north-east, east, and west, the exhausted battalion had slept like dead men. The townspeople, relieved in mind by the presence of so many English soldiers, slept like Flemings—very nearly the same thing. The Burgomaster slept; M. le Maire followed his example. M. le Docteur and M. l'Avocat slumbered profoundly too. Only M. le Curé, being restless for some reason or other, resolved to spend the night on the church-tower in the company of his breviary, an electric reading-lamp, a bottle of strong coffee, and a battered but excellent night-glass, the property of his late maternal uncle, an Admiral of the French Navy.

Four hours they had slept, when a furious clangour from the church bells awakened the sleepers. Shrill whistles screamed, bugles were sounded, Staff officers and company commanders clattered out of their quarters—the battalion jumped like one man to its feet. Voices talked over the wires of the field-telephones. An artillery patrol-leader had ridden into the advance of a column of heavy motor-lorries approaching the bridge that crossed the river, carrying the highway that had brought the battalion from the south. Lorries heavy-laden with—French infantry!—for an outpost's flashlight on the advance had revealed the

Allies' uniform. Well, what of it! French troops were in the east upon the Yser. But still the crazy church-bells jangled and clanged and pealed, shrieking:

"Réveillez-vous, Messieurs les Anglais! Vous êtes Surprit, les Allemands sont ici! Réveillez-vous! Aux armes! Aux armes!"

And another broad arrow of dazzling blue-white light showed motor-lorries packed with spiked helmets and green-grey tunics, behind the *képis* topping men in blue coats and red breeches. The gunners of the howitzer, spared for the point commanding the road south of the bridge, were picked off by German sharpshooters before they could fire. The officer with the machine-gun was bayoneted and the gun itself seized. Revolvers cracked and spat incessantly, bayonets plunged through the darkness into grunting bodies. Britons and Boches strove in a *mêlée* of whirling rifle-butts and pounding fists. And by the light of star-shell, shrapnel, and machine-gun-fire from the other side of the river began to play indiscriminately on the assailants and the assailed. Under cover of this fire, the Germans would have rushed the bridge, but for the Factory stuffed with machine-guns, pumping lead from its windows, and the howitzer—Oh! bully for the howitzer! thought the wounded man.

His company had been entrenched as a reserve near the bridge in the mouth of a faubourg running westwards. They had doubled out to support the bridge-party in the moment of alarm. He had been shot then in the right arm and had gone on using his revolver with the left hand. It was not until some well-timed shrapnel from the R.F.A. battery north-east of the town began to burst among the green-grey uniforms, and the Kaisermen took to their motor-lorries and went off, carrying their wounded and leaving many dead—that Franky had been sensible of any pain.

"You've been pipped, old man," had said the commander of the bridge-company, mopping a smudged and perspiring visage with a handkerchief that shrieked for the wash.

"By the Great Brass Hat! so I have, but I'd forgotten all about it," said Franky, surveying the carnage in the golden sunlight of the newly-minted day. "Look at these fellows in French uniforms. It's an insult to the Allies to bury 'em like that. Couldn't we take off the blue coats and red baggies before we stow 'em underground? And the prisoners. What beauties! Whining 'Kamerad!' to our chaps, and putting their hands up for mercy. Do they suppose——"

The speaker ceased, for the brother-officer who had commanded the bridge-company was absorbed in looking through his binoculars at a silvery speck in the western heavens. It grew into a British R.F.C. scouting biplane, that came droning overhead at 4,000, circled, fired a white rocket for attention, dived nearer, circled again, and dropped a scrawled message in a leaded clip-bag.

"*Enemy-column—infantry with motor-lorries and two guns crossing river—bridge a mile to the West of you—hurrying hell-for-leather North. Dropped them two bombs. Bigger column advancing from North with more motor-lorries and howitzers. Look out for squalls that direction. Roads to South all clear.*"

"Those crossing the bridge to west of us will be the gentlemen who came round that way to leave their cards!" said the Lieutenant-Colonel Commanding as the biplane sang itself away. "Probably a column detached for the surprise from the bigger force to the north. Well, we seem to have finished top-dog. Let's hope they won't tackle us again until the men have had their coffee. 'Phone the Brigadier at Zille! And 'wireless' the news of the scrimmage to the

Divisional Commander at Baix and Marwics thirty miles south of us, and get a message through to Sir Kenneth"—he named the General Officer Commanding the A.C. to which the Brigade belonged. "And give details to the G.H.Q. at St. O., don't forget! Not that we'll get much credit over this." The Colonel scowled, surveying from the sandbagged window of Headquarters, situate in the Factory, the long lines of stretchers being trotted off by the R.A.M.C. bearers to the town Hospital. He rubbed his finger under the bristles of his close-clipped moustache with a rasping sound that conveyed his irritation as he went on: "That's the worst of these rotten little Advance-guard actions! They're expensive, infernally expensive. The casualties are heavy and the credit *nil*."

"Possibly, sir, but at any rate we've wiped out a lot of these Boche beggars," said the Battery Commander, optimistically. "Halloa! Bird over! And it's a Boche plane!"

A two-seated Taube, shining silver in the morning sunshine, had come out of the golden mists to northward, rolling up the landscape under its steel belly with wonderful steady swiftness. At some 3,000 above the town, it hovered, making a queer buzzing noise.

"I've heard that song before," said the Adjutant, his eyes glued to his binoculars. "You remember, sir, at Fegny?"

"The spotter our fellows christened the Buzzard. At his old smoke-signalling tactics." The Colonel snatched the Field-telephone, spoke, and from a gaping skylight at the top of the tall, square, many-windowed Factory an extravagantly-tilted Maxim began to pump lead skywards in a glittering fan-shaped stream. "Queer effect, uncommonly! Looks as if it were raining upside down. . . . Gad!—I believe that hit him!" he added, as a small dark object fell from the Hunnish monoplane. But it was only the inevitable miniature parachute with the smoke-rocket attached

to it belching gouts of black vapour. The Buzzard ceased buzzing, banked, and climbed gracefully out of view.

And then, with a leaping of green-white tongues of flame away in the north, beyond a long sunlit stretch of level country fringed with poplars and streaked with canals, and patched with brown cornfields and golden-tinted woods and apple-laden orchards, and dotted with little towns and villages, the heavy German field-guns and 11.2-inch Krupp howitzers began to shower shrapnel and big steel shells of High Explosive upon the devoted little town.

The Kaisermen had got the range from their spotter. Half of the single Field battery of 18-pounder quick-firers were put out of action in the twinkling of an eye. The little town became a storm-centre, canopied by soot-black smoke, stabbed by the fierce blue glares of the shell-bursts. The houses were toppling. The ruins were blazing. The gasometer near the station was hit and blew up with a fearful explosion. The streets were full of shrieking, stampeding, dying townspeople and children. "Save us! Take us with you!" they screamed to the Englishmen. For the Divisional Commander at Baix and Marwics had telegraphed "Retire," and the battalion was preparing to evacuate the town.

A great shell wrecked the Factory, killed the Adjutant and many of the machine-gunners, and slightly wounded the C.O. The Romanesque church-tower, whose bells had shrieked alarm in the little hours of the morning, rocked, staggered, and collapsed over its famous chime.

Again, men had melted as you laid your hands on them, blown into crimson rags as their mouths opened shouting to you. It had been Hell, Franky remembered, sheer, absolute, unvarnished Hell. The Battalion Surgeon-Major had been dressing his wounded arm in the open street when the Death-blizzard had broken upon them. A lump of shrapnel hit Franky in the ribs on the right side and some R.A.M.C. bearers carried him, vomiting blood, into the baker's shop. Possibly they were killed—for a shell hit and burst, and

wrecked the house in the instant of their leaving it—and they never came back again. Their charge, in his helplessness, had escaped death by a narrow shave. The plank flooring of the upper room, dropping from the broken joist at the fireplace end, had formed a penthouse over him—lying on the blood-soaked stretcher on the tiled flooring——shielding him from the avalanche of household furniture, glass and crockery, descending from overhead.

Thus he had lain, partially unconscious, when what was left of the battalion marched out of the town. Most of the population followed on the blistered heels of the British soldiers, helping to carry the stretchers of the wounded and crippled men who under that blizzard of fiery Death had been got out of the burning Hospital. Not all had been got out. Franky, lying bloody and smothered with plaster, and helpless under the penthouse of planking that had saved him, had heard the screams of these—such pitiful, heart-rending screams.

Then the bombardment had stopped, and the mere relief from that intolerable torture of outrageous sound was Heaven. The screams from the burning Hospital had ceased, but when the earth had shaken with the approach of a great host, and German cavalry in green-grey uniforms with covered helmets had ridden through the ravaged streets, and the tottering walls had trembled at the passage of colossal motor-tractors dragging 11.2-inch Krupps and carrying huge loads of German gunners, engineers, and infantry—and German voices had shouted harshly up and down the streets—and German heads were thrust from open windows—and the work of Pillage, so dear to the German heart, was being carried out with German thoroughness—the screaming had begun again.—Cries of women and children, shouts of men; pleas, expostulations, prayers for mercy in French or Flemish, brutal laughter, German oaths, threats, and orders; subsequently, to the accompaniment of "*Deutschland, Deutschland, über Alles*"—the popping of corks

and the breaking of glasses—Hochs for Kaiser and Kronprinz, fierce disputes over the divison of booty, more shrieks of women and girls. . . . To the funeral adagio of picks and mattocks upon the cobblestones of the Market Square. A volley then, and shots and more shots. . . . Subsequently Private of Infantry, Max Schlütter, made these scrawled entries in his note-book; testifying to the Sadism prevailing among the troops of the Attila of To-day:

"*October —th*, 1914. *Great day of loot and plunder! We shelled the cowardly English—a whole Army Corps with a brigade of heavy Artillery—out of the village of H——. The Hospital, Barracks, Church, and many houses destroyed by our guns. The Mayor, the Burgomaster, and the Registrar shot for harbouring our enemies. The priest tied up to his church-door, tortured, and then burnt, for ringing the bells to warn the English of our approach. Lieutenant Rossberg had a little girl butchered like a pigling, and pounded the feet of some lame English soldiers we found hiding, to teach the swine how to dance. They too were shot. Decidedly the Lieutenant is a funny fellow. All the people who had not run away brought out of their houses and shot. They filled the air with their lamentations. After a grand gorge and a big swill, we now all drunk and slept on the pavements by the light of a magnificent silvery moon. Burned more houses, and continued the march next day with a hellishly bad head.*"

"How long before they find me out?" Franky had wondered. But the plaster-whitened brown boots sticking stiffly out under the penthouse of broken flooring must have looked as though they clothed the rigid feet of a dead man. "Presently they will come!" he had promised himself. But though they had sacked the baker's shop and visited the other rooms in the dwelling, no one had entered the ravaged little parlour, split open from floor to ceiling by the upburst

of the High Explosive, and offering its ravaged, worthless interior to the scrutiny of every passing eye.

Worn and spent with fierce exertion, hard fighting, and loss of blood, delirious with the rising fever of his wounds, he was conscious in whiffs and snatches. The conscious intervals made fiery streaks across broad belts of murky shadow, a No Man's Land wherein Franky wandered, meeting things both beautiful and hideous, knowing nothing real except thirst, racking cramps, and stabbing pain.

The second day passed. At sun-high a distant fury of guns broke out. Through the terrible drum-fire of Prussian Artillery he fancied he could hear the British field-guns, hammering out Death in return for Death. Suffering agonies for lack of water, he sustained life with scraps of chocolate broken from a half-cake carried in a breast-pocket. To move one hand and carry it to his mouth was possible at cost of ugly pain. Night fell, a night that was rainy, and windy, full of cool drippings that wet Franky's clothes without visiting his baked lips, and still the cannonade went on ceaselessly—so that the crazy walls that sheltered him shuddered and the earth vibrated, and the eeriness was made more eerie with the sliding of tiles from broken rafters, and the creaking and banging of broken doors, slammed by ghostly, invisible hands. Pale splashes of light,—reflected stabs of fire from the muzzles of those unsleeping guns in the south and west, made the darkness yet more dreary. Rats scrambled and squeaked, close to him in the obscurity, evoking horrible suggestions of being gnawed and bitten as one lay helpless there. . . . He gritted his teeth to keep back the cry that nearly broke from him as one rodent crossed him, its hooked claws rattling against his straps and buttons, its cold hairless tail sliding snakily over his hand. He fancied that he saw its eyes shining in the darkness—he was certain that it had moved and lopped round behind him—he felt its whiskered snout cautiously approaching

the throbbing artery beneath his ear. . . . Then his nerve left him, and he croaked out feebly, though it seemed to him that he shouted:

"S'cat, you brute! Get, you beggar! Halloa; Halloa! *Belges au secours! Ici un Anglais, grievement blessé!* Is anybody there?"

But there came no answer save the muffled thunder of guns in the distance, the crackle of fire in houses that were burning, the gurgling of a broken water-main, and the distressed miaowing of a cat. It came nearer. There was a rustling sound, and the light descent of a furry body on padded feet; Pussy had jumped in where the window had been, alighting not far from Franky. He could see a pair of green eyes lamping in the darkness, and called, seductively:

"Pussy, pussy! Come here, old girl!"

The purr came near. Franky, with infinite torment reached out a hand, felt and stroked a warm, furry body. He said, cautiously feeling for the appreciative, sensitive places at the nape of a cat's neck, and under the jaws:

"Good old girl. Don't know what they call cats in Flemish, but Pussy seems to be good enough for you. Stop and scare the rats away, give 'em fits, eh, Pussy? You're agreeable? Good egg! Oh—I say!"

For Pussy had walked, loudly purring, on to the chest that heaved so painfully, and proceeded to knead the surface scientifically, preparatory to curling down. Franky set his teeth, and bore the ordeal. Thus they kept company until morning, when Pussy, who proved to be a lean white Tom with patches of sandy tortoiseshell on flanks and shoulders, withdrew by the fanged opening where the window had been. A moment later Franky heard his late companion lapping noisily from a street-puddle and knew envy, in the anguish of his own unrelieved thirst.

He wandered then for a space of hours or instants, in the days of his own lost childhood. He was in the night-nursery

at Whins, suffering from some feverish ill. He felt the prickling as of innumerable ants running up his limbs and the sweat upon his forehead, and called moaningly to Nurse for drink. But it was his mother in her dinner-dress, with shining jewels crowning her dark hair, and wreathing her neck and starring her bosom, who came to the bedside and leaned over him, put the rumpled hair from his hot forehead, and held to his lips the cup of milk. Then a droning sound made the room vibrate, and he was back with his company in the hastily-dug trench across the mouth of the west-running thoroughfare, and church-bells were clanging and the telephone-buzzer was calling for the reserve to double out and reinforce the men in the trench enfilading the bridge. . . .

Then he was awake and the sun was high. Those guns in the west were silent now, though from the south and south-east came heavy thuds and long vibrations. Through the rents in the flooring above him by which the rain had dripped upon him in the night, he was looking at the blue sky. A big white bird hovered there. Not a bird—a Taube. *The* Taube, and he had not dreamed the buzzing after all.

Oh, but it was queer to lie there under the keen scrutiny of that eye in the heavens! It made the prickly ants swarm up Franky's thighs and sides until the sensation grew unbearable. Hate, fierce hate of the murderous, beautiful thing droning up there in the azure sky above its curious misty circle made him see everything red, made him want to yell and shriek. For Margot was in danger, somehow—somewhere—while one lay helpless as a log. . . .

"Steady, old child!" whispered Franky to himself, warningly. "You're going off your chump. Hold still!"

And he held still. The Buzzard ceased to buzz, and floated on, droning. He fancied that he felt its shadow darken and pass over him, moving from his head to his feet.

The noise of the tractor stopped. Reflected in the area of a skewed wall-mirror he saw the machine volplane down, and alight without a falter in the Market Place—before the smoking ruins of the Town Hall.

## CHAPTER LXI

### LYNETTE DREAMS

UPON that same night in October nearly five weeks following the breaking of the Woe Wave, Lynette Saxham had a strange dream.

It seemed to her that she saw piled up in one colossal heap the riches of all the world, the world we know and the world we have forgotten; the treasures of all ages piled up higher than Kilimanjaro, or Aconcagua, or the cloud-mantled peak of Mount Everest. To her feet as she stood spell-bound amongst the foothills, rolled jewelled crowns, and huge barbaric torques and diadems of rough gold, precious cups, vases, and chargers; outpoured treasures of precious stones and wrought gems of inconceivable beauty and vileness, wondrous fabrics, marvels of sculpture, weapons, armour and coins of age beyond the ages—rude discs of tarnished gold, stamped with the effigies of forgotten kings. Orders, decorations, the paraphernalia of Pomp, the stage-properties of Power, the symbols of every religion, save One, were mingled in the stupendous pile, and a terrible Voice cried:

"Gone is the age of pride in possession! Chattels and fardels are no more! The days have spilt like pearls from a broken necklace! Time has eaten the years as the moth a garment of wool! Foredone, foregone, finished! Who now will gather riches from the Dustheap of the World?" And as new avalanches of treasure rolled downwards to the reverberation of that thunderous shout, a Hand of Titanic proportions hurled down upon the heap a war-chariot of beaten gold, with great scythed wheels, and jewelled harness; and that vision changed, and the dreamer was drowning, deep down in clear green seas, under the rushing keel of a huge

barbaric War-galley that was all of gold, arabesqued and bossed with jewels, and coral, and pearl.

And the sense of suffocation passed, and a wonderful cool peace flowed in upon Lynette. She seemed to be led by a beloved hand that had been dust for years, into a bare walled place through which a thin breeze piped shrilly. Someone was there, doing some manual labour. He turned, and with a shock of unutterable rapture Lynette was looking in the face of her lost boy.

Bawne had grown thin and seemed taller. His temples had hollowed, his plume of tawny-gold hair hung unkempt over his wide white forehead. But his blue eyes were as sweet as ever. She had never realised how like they were to Saxham's in shape and colour, and in expression, until now. He thrust his lower jaw out and knit his brows slightly, as though her face were fading from his vision, and he wished to fix in mind the memory of its well-loved features:

"Stay, Mother! Oh! Mother, don't leave me!" he cried, and stretched out his hands to her, and she awakened, weeping for sorrow and joy.

It was broad day. Her husband was not there. She rose and bathed in the cold water she loved, and dressed in the simple Quaker-like grey that set off her fairness, and went out to Mass. . . . The day's Preparation was taken from the noble prayer of St. Ambrose, Bishop and Confessor:

"*And now before Thee, O Lord, I lay the troubles of the poor; the sorrows of nations, and the groanings of those in bondage; the desolation of the fatherless; the weariness of wayfarers; the helplessness of the sick; the struggles of the dying; the failing strength of the aged; the ambitious hopes of young men; the high desires of maidens; and the widow's tears. For Thou, O Lord, art full of pity for all men: nor hatest aught of that which Thou hast made.*"

He even loved von Herrnung, who had taken her boy, and

kept him in slavery, and robbed the joyous light from his sweet eyes, and set amongst his red-brown hair one sinister streak of white. She saw the bleached forelock dangling before her eyes when she shut them and tried to pray for the Enemy:

"Oh God! forgive that evil man, and turn his heart towards mercy and pitifulness, and give me back Thy precious gift, for the love of Her who is Thy Mother!"

It was yet early when she returned to Harley street and passed at once into the Doctor's consulting-room. There, where her lips had first kissed him, sleeping in his chair, she found Saxham sitting at his table, with his sorrow of heart revealed in the stoop of his great shoulders, and his greying head resting upon his hands. Not a sound did he utter, but the attitude was more than eloquent:

"Oh my son!" it said. "Oh me!—my little son!"

"Owen!" she said, coming to his side and touching him. Then, as he started and looked up: "Bawne is alive!" she cried. "I have seen him in a dream, and he has spoken to me. He was in a bare high place with corrugated iron walls, whitened. It made me think of the Hospital at Guelders-dorp in the old days, and of a hangar. . . . His clothes were soiled and torn, and his hands were blackened. One other thing I saw—but I will not wring your heart by telling you. . . . It is enough that I have seen our boy. . . . alive. Oh! thank God!" She stopped, and the rose of joy faded from her cheeks, and only the tears were left there. Her eyes widened with a terrible doubt. "You *knew!* . . . It is in your face! You had heard . . . something, and you did not tell me!"

"I had not the courage. Despise me, for I deserve it! I had news of Bawne at the end of August. He is with that man who stole him—" He clenched the hand that rested on the table until the knuckles showed white upon it and his hair was wet upon his forehead and his mouth was twisted awry. "Taken with him on errands of aërial reconnais-

sance—carried helplessly into battle as a Teddy bear or a golliwog might be fastened on the front of a racing-plane. And, when I remember that I bade him risk that journey—" Saxham broke off, and turned his face away. She came nearer to him and said:

"But he is alive!—alive, even though he be in danger. My dream was sent to tell me so. Did not the Mother come to me in my sleep and lead me to him? Just as when she came and sent me here to you. Now I will atone for these days of selfish grieving. Only give me work to do!"

"Have you not enough upon your hands already? Too much, I have sometimes feared."

"Only the Hospice and the Schools," she answered eagerly, "and the Training Houses for the elder women. And, thanks to you, these are excellently staffed. If I were to die it would make little difference. Things would go on just the same."

"Would they?"

She stooped, lifted his hand to her lips and kissed it. He looked at her keenly as she did so, and the over-bright flush upon the thin cheeks and the hollows about the beautiful eyes, like the burning touch of her hand and of her lips, told him their tale of woe.

"Not for you. Nothing would ever be the same for you or for Bawne. Therefore—give me more work."

"There is plenty of work, unhappily," he said, "because of this calamity that has fallen upon the nation. We have notice that a hundred wounded men from the Front—many of them cot-cases—will arrive at SS. Stanislaus and Theresa's at three this afternoon."

"I shall be there!"

"I am not going to try to dissuade you. I will not keep back what God has given to me from those who have given so much for England. There is another quarter where you will be of use." His eyes were on the triptych frame before

him. "I speak of that little Lady Norwater—Patrine's friend—I think you have not met?"

"Oh, but I have. We were made acquainted with each other some weeks ago at the Club." Her delicate face contracted. "That day when the news came about the British losses. Just before that poor child Brenda Helvellyn blurted out the dreadful truth. Owen, it was tragic. She had known it from the beginning——"

"And the sister forbade her to breathe a hint of it. That is the attitude of the fashionable Sadducean," said Saxham bitterly, "who not only denies the Atonement and the Resurrection, but will not admit of Death."

"But," she asked him, "what of Lady Norwater? Patrine tells me she is ill."

"She is ill. Lord Norwater—at first reported missing after an action north of Ypres on the —th is now said to have been killed."

Lynette was silent. Her husband knew why her head was bent and her white fingers sought a little Crucifix she wore. She was praying for the dead man. Presently she said:

"He was very brave, I believe?'

"He had been recommended for the Victoria Cross for a special service of great gallantry—rendered during the Battle of the Aisne. He was a brave and simple young man, and very lovable. His wife received the official intelligence of his death yesterday. They 'phoned Patrine, as you know, and sent for me later. Lady Norwater is expecting her confinement at the end of November—and they were alarmed for her."

"Poor little soul! Her baby will be a comfort to her!"

Saxham remembered under what circumstances he had made the acquaintance of Lady Norwater, and his look was rather grim. In his mind's ear he heard again the sweet little voice saying in its fashionable slang jargon:

"Oh no! I rather cotton to kiddies. It's the bother of

having 'em doesn't appeal. It puts everything in the cart for the Autumn Season."

Still, the recent remembrance of her piteousness softened the Doctor's never very adamantine heart towards her, the humming-bird broken on the wheel of implacable Fate. Not unnatural, after all. More of a woman than one would have thought her. How she had clasped her tiny hands together and entreated him, when the worst was feared for her, to save, to save her child.

"Franky's child. Perhaps—the boy he hoped for. Oh! to have to say *hoped*, hurts so dreadfully. Yes, yes! I will be brave and good and quiet. . . . I will do everything that you say. Ah, now I know why all these days I have felt Franky near me, and seen his eyes looking at me out of every stranger's face."

Margot did not cry out in her pain and loneliness for her friend Patrine to come to her, though she sent loving, grateful messages whenever Pat called or 'phoned. But she had said to Saxham, only that morning: "Doctor, I met your wife at the Club not long ago. She is more beautiful, but so much sadder than the portrait you showed me. Ah, yes! I remember why. When I am better, would she come and see me? Perhaps it is inconsiderate that I should ask. But the world is so huge and coarse and noisy and empty"—the little lip had quivered—"and there is something in her face that is so sweet, I have been fancying that it would"—she hesitated—"be good for me and for my baby if she would sometimes visit me. Do you think she would mind?"

Saxham had answered:

"I will ask her." Now he gave the piteous message, and Lynette warmly agreed:

"Of course I will go. Whenever you say I may!"

"Not for some days. She is to see no one yet, and your hands are full with Madame van der Heuvel and Marienne and Simonne." The Doctor referred to an exiled Belgian

lady and her young daughters, who had been received at Harley Street as guests. "And—there is the Hospital—and to-night you have to address this Meeting of Suffragists at the Royal Hall. It is the only decision of yours, let me tell you," said Saxham, "that I ever felt tempted to dispute. My wife upon the same platform with Mrs. Carrie Clash and Fanny Leaven! A triple force of Metropolitan Police on duty, and detectives at all the exits and amongst the audience. It's—" Words failed Saxham.

"It is unspeakably hateful in your eyes. Dear Owen, I know it. But I should be hateful in my own sight if I were to break my word. On the day I first met you we spoke of these views of mine. I hold them still. Marriage has not altered them. It is not in me," said Lynette, "to change!"

"You are the soul of faithfulness in all things!"

"Then do not be grieved that I keep to my given promise. Those who have honoured me by asking me to address them are aware that my convictions are opposed to theirs at points. But while I oppose I admire their ruthless devotion and their magnificent, unswerving policy of self-sacrifice——"

"But these felonies," he protested, "these incendiary attacks upon property——"

"In nine cases out of ten, and I believe the authorities know it as well as the W.S.S.S., such outrages have not been committed by Suffragists at all."

"By whom, then?"

"Have we no enemies without our gates even now when we are at War?"

"Germans. . . ." A light broke in upon Saxham. "It's not impossible. As for scattered literature being evidence—that can be bought anywhere. But granted the blackest sheep of the W.S.S.S. to be proved—piebald, that will not make me less anxious for you to-night."

He touched a heavy plait of the red-brown hair with a tender hand and said to her:

"I grudge that the pearls of my wife's eloquence should be thrown before Suffragists."

"We disagree, dear love," she said to him, "but we do not love the less for it. When the Franchise is accorded to Women, should I vote for one Party and you for another, will that matter a whit to you?"

"Not a whit," he said, as he kissed her. "You may give your vote to whom you choose, so long as the voter remains mine. Who was that?" Saxham's quick ear had heard a footstep in the hall. "Madame van der Heuvel coming back from Mass?"

"It is Patrine!"

"Patrine off and away at this hour?"

"I told her I would explain to you."

"She has explained to you," said Saxham, "and that should be enough."

"Dear Owen! . . . I am sure she wished you to know of it. . . . She has gone down to Seasheere, a little Naval Flying-station on the South-East coast, to meet Alan Sherbrand on the home-flight from Somewhere in France."

"I see in to-day's *Wire* that he has been gazetted Lieutenant," said Saxham. "One rather wonders, all things considered, that it has not happened before."

For not once nor twice in the past weeks the big smudgy contents-bills hung upon railings and worn as a chest-protector by newspaper-vendors, since paper became too scarce an article to line street-gutters with, had trumpeted the name of Sherbrand; and the big black-capitalled headings had set forth his deeds of daring. Only to-day they had announced:

"SHERBRAND OF THE R.F.C. STRAFES ANOTHER HUN-BIRD. BAG BROUGHT UP TO NINE, AND TWO ENEMY KITE-BALLOONS. POPULAR YOUNG AVIATOR NOW VISCOUNT NORWATER, HEIR-PRESUMPTIVE TO BRITISH EARL."

"He may be sent back to the Front at any moment—it is natural that they should wish to be together, don't you think?" The speaker added, as Saxham made no immediate rejoinder: "As they are engaged to be married, and what is more, engaged with your consent."

"She has told you so?"

"No!" A shadow of the old smile hovered upon the sensitive mouth. "I told her, and she could not deny it. . . . Oh, Owen! Do you really believe I have been blind all this time?"

"I should have known that women have clairvoyance in these matters. But Patrine feared that you would think her unfeeling or inconsiderate——"

"And why? Because when God sent me a great grief He gave my poor girl a great happiness? The best earthly happiness, save one, that He holds in His gift."

"I thank Him that you still think so, after thirteen years of marriage!"

"I shall always think so, Owen. And it is a great thing that Patrine has chosen so well. He is true and brave, and loves my dear sincerely. And her love is beautiful and disinterested. There is no taint of baseness in her——"

"She has nothing of Mildred or of David, then," flashed through the Doctor's mind. Lynette went on:

"No one will ever be able to charge her with venality or mercenariness. The succession that they *will* talk of in the newspapers was not dreamed of when she and Alan fell in love."

"The succession! Ah, of course!" the Doctor said; "There is a possible succession to a Viscounty now that Lord Norwater's death is proved fact, but only in case Lady Norwater bears no male child. But a title would not spoil Sherbrand, and I agree with you that it has never influenced Patrine."

"How tired you look!" Lynette said, noting the look of

heavy care and the deep lines of weariness traced on the stern visage.

"I have several critical private cases, and a long list of operations for this morning at SS. Stanislaus and Theresa's. Now go and dress, my sweet, for I have work to do."

And Lynette went with a happier look than she had worn since the crushing blow fell. And Saxham shot the bolt of his consulting-room door and went back to his chair at the big writing-table, and leaned his head upon his hands.

An Atlas burden of care cracked the sinews of the Doctor's huge shoulders. It had not occurred to Saxham when Patrine had gulped out her pitiful story, and he had heartened her by bidding her forget, that forgetfulness would speedily be accomplished at the cost of an honest man.

Now, what to do? Must Sherbrand take the stranger's leavings or David's girl be twice the loser by the stranger's lustful theft? It was a problem to thrash the brain to jelly of grey matter, thought the Dop Doctor, drilling his fingertips into his aching temples—were there no cause for anxiety elsewhere.

Ah! how much more stuffed the pack that burdened the big shoulders. The boy had been taken and the mother would die of grief. You could see her withering like a white rose held near the blast of a smelting-furnace. Yet there was nothing to do but look on and play the game. A bitter spasm gripped the man by the throat, and slow tears, wrung from the depths of him by mortal anguish, splashed on the paper between his elbows and raised great blisters there.

Truly, when the spark of Hope burns dimmest, when the grain of Faith is a thousand times smaller than the mustard-seed—when God seems most far away, He is nearest. We have learned this with other truths, in the War. Blood and tears mingle in the collyrium with which our eyes have been bathed, that we might see.

Saxham battled down his weakness, and rose up and went to duty. None might guess, looking at the Dop Doctor,

that those hard, bright eyes had wept an hour ago. Later on, a moment serving, he went to the telephone.

"Halloa! Is this New Scotland Yard? M.P.O.? Halloa! . . . I am Dr. Saxham, speaking from SS. Stanislaus and Theresa's Hospital, N.W. Can I get word with Superintendent-on-the-Executive, Donald Kirwall? Halloa! . . . Thanks, I'll hold the line."

He waited a minute, and the Superintendent answered:

"Halloa! Dr. Saxham? Anything we can do for you, sir?"

"Yes. Put me on six good plain-clothes men at this Mass Meeting of Suffragists at the Royal Hall to-night. Can you? . . . Halloa! . . . I could do with eight or ten!"

"Halloa! . . . Well, sir, we'll do what we can. We'll be pretty strong in force there, as it happens, Marylebone and Holborn and St. James's Divisions. . . ." Something like an official chuckle came over the line. "Mrs. Petrell in the chair, and the Clash and Fanny Higgins. We've learned to look for trouble when they get up to speak. Halloa! Beg pardon! I didn't quite hear! . . ."

Saxham had cursed the popular leaders.

"Yes, I was aware they'd prevailed on Mrs. Saxham to address 'em. . . . Indeed, they're advertising her all over the shop. . . . Halloa? . . . Certainly we'll put you on the plain-clothes men you ask for. But even without Police to protect her, Mrs. Saxham don't run much risk. Halloa! . . . Why! . . . Oh! because an uncommon big percentage of the audience on these packed nights are out-and-out loose women. Soho and Leicester Square, and all that lot. . . . Others come up from Poplar and Stepney and Bethnal Green and Deptford to hear Fanny Higgins. Halloa? Do they want the Vote? Well, naturally these gay women like the idea of being Represented in Parliament. If respectable females are going to get good of it, naturally the prostitutes want the Franchise. They hold that Woman

Suffrage 'ud improve their conditions. Halloa! . . . You don't know but what the gay women have as good a right to vote as the gay men who employ 'em? No more don't I! But whatever they are, they appreciate those who spend their lives in trying to help the unfortunate. And, West or East-Enders—the most chronic cases among 'em wouldn't suffer a finger to be laid on your wife. All the same, I'll attend to your instructions. Doors at 7. The men shall be there. Don't worry yourself! Four ready back of the Platform and four more posted right and left of the proscenium. Don't mention it! Very proud to. . . . Good-afternoon!"

"Good-afternoon and thanks, Superintendent!"

And Saxham rang off, more relieved in mind than he would have cared to own. Then the horn of a motor sounded below in the Hospital courtyard, and another and another followed. Tyres crackled on gravel. The running feet of men pattered on pavement. The hall-porter whistled up the speaking-tube into the Medical Officer's Room, and Saxham went down, meeting the black-robed Mother Prioress and the Sister Superintendent on their way to the great vestibule.

## CHAPTER LXII

### WOUNDED FROM THE FRONT

THE wide-leaved front doors stood open. Doctors and surgeons, theatre-assistants, students, white-habited Sisters, blue-and-white-uniformed nurses and probationers, were swarming in the great vestibule. Already a double stream of canvas stretchers, laden with still figures swathed in iodined gauze and cotton-wool padding, were being carried up the wide steps, from the big grey-painted Red Cross motor-ambulances, by R.A.M.C., and blue-uniformed bearers of St. Theresa's Association, while omnibuses, private cars, taxis from Charing Cross and Victoria were hauled up behind, waiting to disgorge their loads. And cheer upon cheer went up from the packed sidewalks and roadway; handkerchiefs waved from the windows of the nearest houses, and the passengers on the roofs of the omnibuses passing up and down Wellington Road, Edgware Road, and Praed Street, stood up and craned their necks in the fruitless endeavour to glimpse the reason of those frantic cheers.

For the first convoy of wounded from the Front had reached the Hospital. These unwashed, begrimed, hairy brigands, these limping tramps in tattered khaki, these bandaged cripples leading blind comrades, were our Guards, our Gunners, our Highlanders, Kents, Middlesex men and Munsters, our Rifles and Northamptons, our Welsh and Gloucesters, our Scots Greys and Lancers, our immortals of those red-hot days of August, and their compeers, the terrible fighters of the Marne and the Aisne. . . .

They were back, full of cross-nicked, nickel-coated Mauser bullets, bits of shell and lumps of shrapnel, cheap jokes, music-hall choruses, vermin, and spunk. The reek of lysol

and carbolic, the sickly whiff of dysentery and the ghastly stench of gangrene, brought back to Saxham the Hospital at Gueldersdorp, as he passed back and forth between the stretchers, issuing swift orders, briefly wording directions, marshalling his trained forces with the generalship that had distinguished him of old.

"Doctor!"

"What is it, Ironside?" Saxham turned to speak to the Resident Medical Officer. "You look off-colour, man!"

"I feel off, sir. They're so damned full of grit, and cheerful! Not only the cases from the Base Hospitals, but those casualties they've sent us direct from the trenches. . . . Two days in the train getting to Calais—and Lord! the straw and filthiness in their wounds! And we've been told our next War'd be carried out on an absolutely Aseptic Basis, and here we are back in 1900!"

"Not quite," said Saxham. "Wounds like these were never made by Boer shrapnel. Human bodies shattered beyond imagination by High Explosive, rank among the triumphs of Modern Science. After the Stone Age and the Iron Age, the Golden Age and the Age of Shoddy has come the Age of Militant Chemistry. Martianism, in a word."

"It's an ugly word. . . . Doctor, that man over there," the speaker indicated a pair of hollow eyes staring hungrily over a huge iodine-smeared gauze muffler, "wants to know if we can save his lower jaw? Not that there's much left of it. His pal, who interprets for him, says a wounded German officer shot him in the face with his revolver, 'cos he went to give the blankety blank a drink out of his water-bottle. One of the Gunners—and not long married, according to the pal."

"All right, tell him! Name him for one of my beds," Saxham said brusquely, and nodded to the owner of the desperate eyes, saying, as they flared back their gratitude: "Even if it had been 1821 in the cattle-truck, we're in the Twentieth Century here. Warn Burland," he named the

anæsthetist, "for duty at once. Gaynor Gaynes and Frost to be ready with the X Ray on Flat I. Mr. Whitchett and Mr. Pridd to act as Assistant Surgeons. We'll take the worst cases straight away——"

"But, my God, sir! most of these men are beyond Surgery," groaned Ironside, cracking his finger-joints. "Broken and mashed and rent as they are, what they need is to be re-created! . . . If Christ were to look in here just now," the Medical Resident cried in his bitterness, "there'd be plenty of work in His line. New tissues to make, bony structures to re-build. Organs to replace where organs have been destroyed. He'd have done it by mixing earth with His saliva and anointing. We might as well spit on twenty per cent. of these fellows—for all the good we can do!"

"Give them liquid nourishment—brandy where necessary, and send those I've tagged up to the theatre. No waiting to wash—in their cases. And remember my Gunner gets the first look-in!"

Saxham turned and ran at speed, making for the nearest elevator, found it just going up full of stretcher-cases lying close packed as sardines, turned and shot up the stone staircase three steps at a time to the first floor, glittering with white enamel, polished oak, brass fittings and cleanliness, under the discreet radiance of shaded electric lights. The centre space was occupied by the tribune engirdling the domed Sanctuary of the Chapel. Short corridors tastefully adorned with red-enamelled buckets, blue glass bombs of chemical fire-extinguisher, and snaky coils of brass-fitted hose, led to long wards running east, west, north, and south.

"Eh, Doctor!"

A fair-faced, gentle-eyed Sister of Mercy, in the wide-winged starched linen cap and guimpe, and white twill nursing-habit with the black Cross, stood near the lift,

talking to a tall, raw-boned, white-haired Surgeon-General of the R.A.M.C. She greeted Saxham's appearance with a little womanly cry:

"Eh, Doctor! Never it rains buddit pours." There was a hint of Lancashire in her dialect. "The R.A.M.C. have sent us ten more cases. Dear, dear!—but we'll have our hands full."

"Then you'll be happy, Sister-Superintendent. I've never known you so beamingly contented as when you were regularly run off your feet, and hadn't a minute to say your Rosary. Anything specially interesting, Sir Duncan?"

"Aweel!" The broad Scots tongue of Taggart droned the bagpipe-note as of old. "Aweel! There's an abdawminal or twa I'd like ye to throw your 'ee over—an' a G.P. that ye will find in your line. Fracture o' the lumbar vairtebra from shrapnel—received ten o'clock yesterday morr'ning!—an' some cases o' shellitis, wi' intermittent accesses o' raging mania an' intervals o' mild delusions—an' ane will gar you draw on the Medical Officer's Emergency List o' Abbreviated Observations I supplied ye wi' a guid few years agone."

"I've not forgotten."

"I'm no' dootin' but ye have found it unco' useful." Taggart's frosty eyelashes twinkled. "It has saved my ain face from shame mair times than I daur tell." He quoted, relishingly: "M.B.A.—Might Be Anything! G. O.K.—Guid Only Knows! L.F.A.—Luik for Alcohol. A.D.T.—Any Damned Thing! 'Toch, Sister, I beg your parr-don! The word slipped oot—I have nae other excuse! But my case o' shell-shock, Saxham. What say ye to an involuntary simuleetion o' *rigor mortis?* A man sane an' sound an' hale—clampit by his relentless imagination into the shape o' a Polwheal Air-Course Finder, or a pair o' dividers. Half open, ye ken. Ye may stand him on the ground upo' his feet, an' his neb is pointing at the daisies—or ye may lie him o' his back in bed—an' his taes are tickling

the stars. Am thinking it long till I'm bringing ye thegither! But ye are busied. I'll no' keep ye the noo."

Racing for the second lift, just emptied of its sorrowful burden, the big shirt-sleeved Doctor checked in his stride and touched the handle of a sliding door. The door shot back noiselessly in its grooving. Saxham was in a cushioned tribune high above the level of the chapel Altar. The scent of flowers and the perfume of incense hung like a benison on the still air of the sacred place.

In one of the carved stalls of the nave the figure of a priest in cassock and biretta sat reading from a breviary. It was the Chaplain, waiting in readiness to be called to administer Holy Unction and Viaticum to some Catholic soul about to depart. In the choir behind the high Altar a slight girl, in the frilled cap and prim black gown of the Novitiate, knelt on a rush-bottomed prie-dieu absorbed in meditation, her black Rosary twisted round her clasped hands. Prayers that are most earnest are frequently incoherent. Saxham formulated no petition as he knelt there in the tribune, but the cry of his heart to the Divine Hearer might have been construed into words like these:

*"If Thou wert here in the visible Body as when of old Thou didst walk on earth with Thy Disciples, Thou wouldst heal these broken sons of Thine with Thy look, Thy Touch, Thy Word! Yet art Thou here—for Thou hast said it, ever present for Thy Faithful in Spirit, Flesh, and Blood. Help O Helper! Heal O Healer! Lord Jesus, present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, give power and wisdom to Thy servant. Aid me, working in the dark by my little flame of hard-won knowledge, to preserve life, Thou Giver of Life! Amen."*

So having prayed, the Dop Doctor went up to the theatre and wrought mightily, doing wonderful things in the way of patching and botching the broken bodies of men. Later, as he sat in the Harley Street dining-room playing the court-

eous, attentive host to sad-eyed, wistful Madame van der Heuvel and her two pretty daughters—for Lynette had dined earlier on account of the Suffrage Meeting—he heard a latch-key in the front-door and Patrine's well-known step in the hall.

He excused himself, rose and went out, and spoke to his niece. She made a croaking sound in answer, as unlike the voice of Patrine as the pinched and sunken face revealed by the hall electroliers, resembled the face of dead David's handsome girl. The mouth hung lax. The cheeks had fallen. The eyes stared blank and tearless, from hollow caves under the broad black eyebrows. He said with a pricking of foreboding:

"You have had a long day! . . ."

"Not long enough to tire me. I am made of india-rubber, I think, and steel."

He considered her a moment with grave, keen eyes that had no gleam of curiosity.

"Sherbrand is well? He returned from France in safety?"

"He was quite in the pink when he arrived—and ditto when he left. Not that he had much time. A wireless came, ordering him to replace an aviator of the Royal Flying Corps, killed on observation-duty—or whatever it is they call it—with our fellows on the new Front. Rough on him, but he took it smiling. No, thanks! I'm not keen on dinner. . . . You won't mind if I go to my room?"

"One moment. Have you had food to-day?" he asked her.

"I forget. . . . Yes, of course! There was luncheon at one o'clock. The people at the Air Station did us tremendously well." Her mouth twisted. "I think it better to tell you and Lynette that Alan Sherbrand and I have said ta-ta!" She tried to smile. "I'm back on your hands like a bad penny!" Her eyes seemed all black between their narrowed lids.

They were quite alone, no servant within hearing, and the dining-room door was shut. Came the Doctor's low-toned question:

"Has any—third person made mischief between you two?"

"No, nobody has blabbed to him about anything. But--he's wise enough now, as regards this child. Particularly wide-O!" The black, glittering eyes looked dry and hard as enamel. Her teeth again showed in that mirthless grin. "I don't suppose he has the ghost of an illusion left. . . . Women—most women would say I was a howling fool to make a clean breast of it. I never meant to—I can swear! —when first we got engaged. I used to call his goodness stodgy. I think I despised him for it in certain moods of mine. You've never realised the kind of beast I can be. But more and more, I got to respect him! And suddenly—I knew that if I married him under false colours—letting him believe me to be what I amn't—even though he never found me out—I'd—never have been able to shake hands with myself again!"

She moved to the stairs, the sleeve of her coat brushing the Doctor's great shoulder.

"Don't you suppose God had it all his own way," she said in that odd, strangled voice that wasn't like Patrine's. "There were minutes when the World, and the Flesh, and the Devil were jolly well to the fore. Alan would marry me to-morrow if I used the power I *could* use. But I won't! I won't! It'd not be playing the decent, straight game. So I let him call me heartless, and piffle like that, and then the game seemed hardly worth playing. I'd have thrown up my cards—only the Recall came. And we said good-bye, and I saw him fly away like a great white bird, over the water. And I'm so strong—so horribly strong—that I stood it and didn't die. . . . Even if Alan's killed at the Front I shan't die. . . . *Ah-h!* . . . You mustn't touch me!" Her hands plucked themselves violently from

Saxham's that would have enfolded them. "I could stand anything better than pity. Being pitied would kill me—though I'm so awfully strong!"

"Then trust us not to pity you—only to love you. That I look upon you as a daughter is no secret to you, I think?"

"No, dear!" She stroked his sleeve, not lifting her pitifully reddened eyelids, and then he felt her start. "Uncle Owen!" Her hand clenched upon his arm, and her tear-blurred eyes sought his. "I must tell you. . . . He had news to give me to-day—of Bawne!"

"Nothing worse, thank God!—than what I know already," Saxham commented when she had told. He stood in silence a moment, mastering himself, and the electric hall-light showed in his harsh square visage the ravages that grief had wrought.

"How you have suffered! If only I could do something to comfort you!" she muttered. "And Lynette. Do you know—there are days"—a sob caught her breath—"when I daren't even look at Lynette."

"It is so with me!" His voice was deep and quiet and sorrowful. "Old Webster probed deep with his Elizabethan goose-quill, when he wrote of the

> "Greyfe that wastyth a faire woman
> Even as wax doth waste yn flame."

Pray for us both, my dear, and believe that you are a comfort to us."

She said with a laugh that was half a sob: "I might have made a hole in the water at Seasheere, or jumped out of the train on the way back, I daresay, but for the thought of you both. Or, if it wasn't that stopped me, my joss was on the job."

"I had rather say your Guardian Angel."

"Do you think any self-respecting Guardian Angel could possibly bother about a regular bad egg like me?"

"Mine did—when my wife married me and I was a peculiarly bad egg."

"You, you dear!" She suddenly caught him round the neck and hugged him strenuously. "Do you think I don't know—haven't always known how my father and mother treated you!"

"Time heals wounds of that kind," said Saxham, as they turned together from the foot of the staircase, and, still keeping a protecting arm about David's daughter, he reached his hat and stick from the hall-stand, "though you may doubt the statement now."

"I can't. I'd only have to look at mother to——"

"To remember that she is your mother!"

His tone was final in its closure of the subject. But in his heart he thanked frail Mildred once again for her ancient treachery, as he went out to the waiting car, and sped through London's murky streets to the North-West suburb where stands the Hospital.

Patrine went upstairs, holding by the balusters and feeling chilly and old. In the prettily furnished sitting-room, communicating with her chintzy bedroom, were her letters, and a deep cardboard box stood upon a table. It had been sent on to Harley Street from the Club, and bore the address of a Regent Street florist, whose showy establishment boasted a German name.

The fragrance of roses with a musky after-tang in their sweetness permeated the atmosphere. There were no roses amongst the flowers on the chimney-shelf and cabinets. It occurred to Patrine that there must be roses in the box.

Her head was throbbing and her eyes smarted. She threw off her hat and coat, pitched them down upon the chintzy sofa, switched off the electric lights, let up the blinds, pulled a chair close to the open window, and sat down, resting her folded arms on the clean, dustless sill.

Sitting there, staring out into the semi-obscurity of Harley Street, with the late cabs and motors sliding past and

the distant roar of Oxford Street in her ears, she asked herself:

"Have I behaved like an honourable woman or—a blithering idiot? That's what I want to know?"

She waited. Not one pat on the back was vouchsafed by an approving Conscience. The indicator of the dial slowly travelled in the direction of the blitherer. Patrine shut her hot, dry eyes, and began to conjure up the day that had gone over. Its sweetness was rendered infinitely sweeter, its bitterness a hundredfold more poignant by the knowledge that it was the last, the very last.

If she lived to be old, old, old, she knew she would never live to forget Seasheere. The smell of the hot thyme and sun-baked grasses of the cliffs, the rhythmic *frrsh!* of the salt waves upon its shingle, the shrill piping of its gulls, and pale blue of its skies would never fade, never cease, never be silent, never alter. . . . For on Seasheere cliffs her Wind of Joy had blown for the last time.

## CHAPTER LXIII

### BAWNE FINDS A FRIEND

THE machine that could hover like Sherbrand's "Bird of War" had come down in the Market Place. A big grey two-seater monoplane, with the rounded cleft bird-tail and wings of the German Taube type. You could see a number on its side and three big black Maltese crosses, and the profile heads of pilot and passenger showing up in strong relief against the blackened ruins of the Town Hall.

A bomb hung in its wire cage-holder on the visible side of the fuselage. It struck Franky that the airman must be profoundly sure of himself, or culpably reckless to have come down before getting rid of the thing. A swivel-mounting like a barless capital A supported a machine-gun above the radius of the tractor, and well within reach of the pilot's hand.

The pilot got down. He was tall and big, with a red moustache; a man whose natural height and bulk were so augmented by the padded helmet topped with the now-raised goggles, the pneumatic jacket girt in by a broad band of webbing, supporting a brace of large revolvers, and the heavy bandolier he carried, that the figure of his companion, scrambling after him, seemed that of a mere dwarf.

The man who saw, *per* medium of the rakishly-angled looking-glass yet hanging on the wall of the wrecked parlour, conceived a horror of the Troll-like creature in its big helmet, and the full-sized oilskins that hung in folds about its diminutive body, the skirts reaching nearly to the ground. When the two passed beyond the mirror's area of reflection, the doubt whether they might not have discovered his whereabouts and be stealthily creeping up from

the rear to attack him, made him shudder, and brought the perspiration starting in the hollows of his sunken temples and cheeks.

Minutes passed. He waited with his eyes upon the mirror. Someone was approaching from the direction of the Market Place, keeping well under the broken walls of the houses fringing the narrow *trottoir*. Where an avalanche of tiles and brickwork had fallen, *he* must perforce skirt the obstacle, and thus for an instant be reflected in the glass. Meanwhile the sound of nearing footsteps—sometimes muffled in thick dust, or clicking over cobblestones, or tripping and stumbling among bricks and rubble—grew more distinct. The red-moustached giant could not walk so lightly. It must be the Troll—could be no one but the Troll! The suspense of waiting had tensed into unbearable agony when the sound of a voice crying broke out in the deathly silence of the place.

"Oh, oh!" Like a woman or a child's uncontrolled wailing. "Oh—the poor men! Oh, the poor women and the li-ittle ch-ildren! Oh!" and *da capo*, working up to a crescendo of agony, and dying away in heartbreaking sobs. It was so strange—not that there should be weeping in these razed and ravaged streets, but that the voice that wept should be a voice of England—that it begot in the helpless man who heard doubts of his own sanity, and a reckless desire to dissipate such doubts. He heard himself call out:

"Who is crying there?"

And a treble voice piped back, and stumbling over the moraine of *débris* tongueing from the avalanche of broken tiles and masonry, came—not the Troll-dwarf in his huge disguising helmet and outsized pneumatic jacket—but an urchin of twelve or thirteen—in the familiar dress of a Boy Scout—*minus* the smasher hat and staff.

"Me for the gay old life!" meditated Franky. "Thought I was getting groggy in the upper works—and now I know it! A British Boy Scout in his little khaki shirt, with a row

of gadgets on his left sleeve, and ribbon tags to his little garters, all on his little lone in the middle of this—Gehenna!" He spoke to the fever that galloped through his veins in the tone of a patron presiding at the test-display of a Cinema Film Company: "Pretty good, but you can do better. Roll along with a troop of blue-eyed Girl Guides, old Touch-and-Go!"

The Scout's figure vanished out of the glass. There was a sound of scratching and scrambling. The broken floor jarred to the impact of a light body, and a boyish treble called:

"Is—is anybody here? Anybody—English?"

The voice quavered on the last word. Franky knew that this was delirium. He grinned under his four-days' beard, and the grime and soot and plaster that masked him, and answered in a series of Bantu clicks, so leather-dry was his tongue:

"Me as per descrip: to fol: Young British sossifer of good fam: irrepro: ref: and tophole edu: badly dam: by Hun shell! Greatly in need of the com: of a ref: Chris: ho: Mus: in the eve: and intell: conver: greatly appre:" He shut his stiff eyelids and opened them again, but the imaginary Scout had not gone.

"You're dreadfully—hurt. Couldn't I do—something?" the treble voice piped. Its owner was now squatting on his heels in the shade of Franky's penthouse of planks. The knuckles he rested on the floor were cracked and grimy, and his deeply-freckled, fair-complexioned face was lined, and anxious and thin. His blue eyes were swollen with crying, though his sensitive lips wore a wistful, crooked smile. "You *are* real?" he asked wistfully, and Franky answered, huskily:

"Rather! In fact, I'm a lot more real than you. Who *are* you, since we're gettin' personal?" He repeated slowly after the boy:

"'Bawne Mildare Saxham, Scout No. 22. Fox Patrol,

331st London W.' Seems good enough." He shut his hot eyes wearily. "But if you're solid—you'd get me a drink!"

There was a little stir. The Scout had gone. Franky knew it without opening his eyes, yielding to the deadly sinking faintness engendered by the effort of speech. A mountainous weight crushed his chest, and his legs were cold and heavy as ingots of pig-iron. It occurred to him that at this rate the—wind-up—could not be far off. And a great horror fell upon him like a pall, and cold sweat broke forth and streamed upon his haggard face and broken body. Death for one who so loved Life and the pleasant things of a commonplace existence. . . . A cricket-match, a day with the hounds, a funny *revue*, a game of polo, a break at billiards, a clinking run with the car, a fine cigar. Mess in camp after the hard day's march, long, cool drinks with bits of ice tinkling in the tumbler. That new, fierce pleasure tasted in his first experience of real fighting. . . . And oh! how much sweeter than these the scent of Margot's hair, the light of Margot's eyes, the clasp of her arms about his neck, the hope of fatherhood, never now to be realised. . . .

"My little chap!" he muttered, and his heart wept, but no tears came to his arid eyes. Then something cold touched his mouth. The rim of a cup with water in it. "Thank you!" he said, after a gulping draught, opening his eyes with the sense of reviving coolness stealing through his parched vitals. "That's—absolutely IT!"

The boyish treble said with a quaver in it:

"If I set this can beside you—I got the water from the pipe that is running—and the broken cup near it, could you manage to dip it in? Are you able to move this hand?"

"First class!" whispered Franky, lifting the member a very little way and dropping it again. "The—the other arm came in for it when the shrapper hit me in the ribs. . . . Halloa! Chocolate," for a bit touched his lips and was gently pushed between them. "That reminds me. I've an iron ration somewhere about me. No—they took

my pack off when I got crumped up." It had seemed only —decent to Franky in those days of endless foot-slogging, to carry a pack and a Lee-Enfield and fare no better than his men. "Frightfully obliged. But I won't take this." This being another scrap of chocolate. "Is thy servant a Boche that he should stodge kid's grub?"

"You're English!" The blue eyes were full of hungry worship. "Man alive!" quavered the boyish treble, "you don't know how I've wanted to hear an English voice again. Tell me"—he panted and was pale under his multitudinous freckles, and the beating of the childish heart shook the thin young frame—"the Germans haven't beaten England—and sunk our Navy, and wiped out our Army—and killed the King, and Lord Roberts, and the Chief Scout, and Lord Kitchener, and—and my father and mother and everyone?"

"No!" said the wounded man, and his faint whisper was as convincing as though the negative had been shouted with the full strength of vigorous lungs. "Is that the kind of lie they've been pitching you? Perhaps it does 'em good to believe it! Let 'em, if they like. It'll never be true!"

"I knew it couldn't!" The clear treble had lost its quaver. "And yet there were times when I was funky. *He* seemed so awfully sure at—the beginning! And—the Enemy never stops—rubbing it in!"

"Who is the Enemy?"

"His name is von Herrnung. And—and I must go now, for—for your sake." The eyes flickered, and their pupils dilated to wide circles of frightened blackness. "He might wake up—and come—and find you. And if he found you——"

When the arteries have been almost depleted by hæmorrhage, and the strength of the body has ebbed to vanishing point, the brain is sometimes dazzlingly clear. Thus, though the faint whisper barely reached the ear of the other, the haggard eyes looking out of the begrimed and unshaven face

of the man lying in the blood-soaked stretcher were alert and observant. He said reassuringly:

"He won't come just yet. Tell me more about him, and all about yourself."

How strangely lined and pinched and puckered was the young face with its clear red-and-white sprinkled over with brown freckles. Fine dust of dew-beads started upon forehead and temples and cheeks, the half-opened mouth twitched nervously, though he thrust out his under-jaw and knitted his reddish brows in a gallant effort of self-control.

"His name is von Herrnung. He is the German Field Flight officer who took me away from England. I wrote down the date in my Scout's pocket-book so that I mightn't forget. It was July 18th. He was trying Mr. Sherbrand's hawk-hoverer at Hendon. He asked me to go up with him——"

"Great Snipe!" panted Franky weakly. "Are YOU the boy who dropped the wallet with the Clanronald Papers and the scratched message in the North Sea?"

The blue eyes understood. "There was a wallet," said their owner. "I don't know what was inside, of course. But he——"

A spasm of trembling went through the slender body. He bent his head, and blinked his eyes, and the muscles of his throat and jaw worked as though he fought down an hysterical access of tears. And a broad shaft of golden light, falling on the young bare head, showed how the shining red-brown hair had been roughly clipped in ridges, leaving a forehead-tuft oddly streaked with white. Amongst the crowds of homeless exiles endlessly streaming along the roads of this scourged and tortured country, or crouching amongst the wreckage of its ruined villages and battered towns, heads even younger than this boy's had displayed the tragic sign.

"Poor kid!" Franky muttered, recognising it as the result

of overwhelming physical shock and unnatural mental strain. "He knew what was inside? . . ."

"I don't think so! If he had known when the submarine picked us up in the North Sea—I think he would have killed me! He would like to kill me now, he says"—the apple in the boy's throat jerked—"because through me he has been *degradiren*—reduced from Captain to Supernumerary Officer Pilot—and has had his Third Class of the Red Eagle taken away! That was done at the big Wireless Station—Nordeich, they called it——"

"Nordeich. . . . Of course . . . in German West Friesland. Thrash along—I'm following you. Did they Court Martial the Flying Man?" Franky whispered; and Bawne whispered back:

"The Emperor punished him! . . ."

"The Emperor, did you say? . . ."

"Yes. He came to Nordeich—in— I've forgotten what they call it when great people want to move about without red carpets and lots of fuss."

"Incognito."

"Incognito. He'd broken off his yachting-trip in Norwegian waters—and landed at Kiel only that day. I heard men whisper it. . . . He was dressed in the field-grey, like his War Minister von Falkenhayn—and his generals of the Imperial Staff—and all the other officers and men. But he 'stripped off the War-harness,'—that's what they called it! —before he got into the Potsdam train."

"Go on! . . . What did he look like? . . . They say he has changed a lot o' late."

"I couldn't tell. I'd only seen photos that made him look younger and hid his short arm. But even if he hadn't sat while the others stood—and worn the Iron Cross, Grand Class—and the Black Eagle with diamond swords and a Crown Imperial—I'd have known it was the Emperor, by his eyes."

"By his eyes, you say! . . ."

The boy's heart throbbed visibly, the breath came in short puffs through his nostrils, and his lips were twisted awry as he smiled. The smile stiffened out as he nodded. "By his awful eyes! . . . When they looked at you they made you feel tired, and empty, and—queer. But when they got angry—you were reminded of—of a tiger lurking to spring out of a cave of ice!"

"Ah! So he got angry, did he?"

Bawne nodded.

"When I wouldn't answer the questions he asked me—he talked English—about how the brown satchel had come unstrapped and tumbled into the sea. And he said to an officer: 'Show him your whip!'—and he did—and it was short-stocked and covered with leather, like a dog-whip—with three thongs strung with little balls of lead. Man alive! you ought to see my back. Though they only hit me once!" He winced, and flushed, and paled. "I was a coward to squeal—though when they asked: 'Will you tell now? I *did* say: 'Not to stop you from killing me!'"

"Good egg you! Great Snipe!—if I'd been there. With a Service Revolver—! Never mind. . . . Go on!"

"I forget. . . . Oh!—they pulled on my shirt and gave me some strong stuff to drink. Corn brandy, I think it was—and then He got up and came round the table and began to talk to me. He said I must not be an obstinate boy, for in another few days there would be War. Our pitiful little Army'd be wiped out and our Fleet sent to the bottom of the sea. The British Isles would be *Deutsch Brittanien*—and English people who would not swear to be good Brito-German subjects of their new Emperor and Overlord would be instantly put to death. But if I told up about the brown satchel I would be permitted to live, and possibly my parents also. If I said No!—nothing would be left but to call back the officer with the whip."

"Coaxin', wasn't he? And what did you tell him?"

"I said: 'You've only said you're going to conquer England, Sir. You haven't done it yet!"

It was not merely the treble voice of a courageous child answering. It was the utterance of a race untamable and indomitable. Franky could hear the metal balls on the whip clink one against another as the loaded thongs were shaken out. . . . He whispered with dry lips:

"Then——?"

"Then I don't quite know. I was sick and sleepy, and the blood was running down my back under my shirt. If they had killed me I wouldn't have cared much. Perhaps he saw that, for he called up von Herrnung. He was not to He dismissed from the Field Flying Service—because of the War that was coming!—but he was to forfeit his Order of the Red Eagle and rank as a Supernumerary Officer Pilot. Man alive!—you should have seen how that big man squirmed and crawled and blubbered." The young lips curled, and the jaw thrust out contemptuously. "'Thanks! Gratitude! . . . My blood to prove devotion! . . . All I ask—the service of danger—the reconnaissance under enemy fire!' And the Emperor——"

"Kicked him, I hope!"

"No, he said: 'Supernumerary Officer Pilot von Herrnung you will now to your Flying Headquarters return. Let it be your task to win back at the cost of a thousand lives—if you had them—the lost esteem of your Emperor. Take this boy with you. Make of him a decent German. It is "up to you," as the English say.' And then the Wireless went *'S'ss! Crackle! Pzz!'* and the telephone-bell said *'Pr'rr!'* and the room was cleared—they said because of a Call from the Winter Palace at Petersburg."

"And where did they take you after you left the Wireless Station? Go on—I'd like to hear you tell!"

The boy glanced round uneasily and then mastered his apprehensions. The grimed hands went to his stocking-top and pulled out a squat little book. The coloured present-

ment of a Boy Scout adorned its soiled leather cover, and the thumbed leaves of the diary within were pencilled from end to end. The Odyssey of a Saxham Pup, one might have called the story whispered into the ear of the wounded man by the boy squatting at his side.

One had been taken by train to Bremen and thence to a place called Taubefeld, in West Hessen. Flight Station XXX was here on a vast stretch of heath. There were rows of great hangars, and a vast army of motor floats and lorries, upon which machines, hangars, telegraph-installations, workshops, mess-houses, and quarters for officers and mechanics, could be placed when the mobilisation-order came and transported by road or rail.

One had fallen sick at Taubefeld—the effects of that North Sea ducking. One had waked up with a skin-cropped head wondering where one was. A woman who helped in the cookhouse had given one broth and gruel and the medicine prescribed by the doctor. One had crawled off one's straw palliasse weakly and shakily, and so won forth into a new, unfriendly world.

One's parole had been taken—and one was thenceforth free to move about and see things—when one was not wanted to help oil or clean wires or sweep up the hangars. There was grub enough: bacon-soup, potato-salad, and sausage, queer but not uneatable. Nobody was really brutal as long as one didn't speak English, or even German with a British accent, too much at one time. *Keine Unterhaltung da!* ("No conversation there!") some officer or N.C. would yell at one, and the rebuke was generally accompanied by the swishing cut of a cane.

Consequently the Saxham Pup had bent himself to acquire German, as spoken by Germans, and schooled himself to employ his eyes and ears while maintaining economy in the use of his tongue. He had found out his whereabouts from an envelope he had picked up, and other

things from listening to the officers' conversation, and the talk of the mechanics in the big hangars.

War was the thing everybody talked about. There was going to be bloody War in a twinkling. The German Navy was going to smash the British Navy into matchwood, everybody was quite sure. The German Army was going to walk over the miserable little British Army—and then would be expiated the sins of the British Government and the diabolical plottings of Sir Edward Grey. Throat-cuttings, shootings, and hangings were mentioned in connection with the above, and other personages whom British Boy Scouts hold in reverence. But one had had to bear it and hold one's tongue, and keep smiling. That was the method of the Chief who had said to one: "Quit yourself like a man."

Brave advice, possible to follow by day when alien eyes were watching. One could choke down weak tears and the ache of the lonely heart that cried for Home and the dear familiar faces, when the Birds of War were roaring and whirring up the flight-field or down out of the sky. But at night, in the grim, unfriendly dark of the sleeping-cupboard, without other witness than the thin, sore-eyed white kitten that shared one's meals and slept beside one on the hard straw mattress under the foul-smelling grey blanket,—things were harder. One had got through, after a fashion, by "rotting" and making believe. One did not set down in the Scout's Note-Book or tell the wounded friend on the stretcher how one had kissed the back of one's own hand, and whispered, "Good-night, Mother!" and touched one's cheek with the tips of two fingers and whispered, "Good-night, and God keep and bless you, my darling boy!"

Amongst other things of interest picked up by day, one found out that Supernumerary Officer Pilot von Herrnung was cold-shouldered by the officers of the Flight Squadron, which he had captained before his fall. No longer top-dog, he was made to pay for his domineering and swaggering. He resented this, by swaggering more. The men talked of

this in the hangars, as they tuned-up wires or cleaned the engines. Von Herrnung was *Unglücklich*. Nobody liked him. The Squadron would not stand him long. Hadn't he insulted the Herr Squadron-Captain Pilot who had succeeded and challenged him, and got his cartel back again?

"Colossal insolence!" he had fumed. "A challenge from a person of my rank confers an honour on him who receives it. Not a man among you stands upon my level. Deny it if you can!"

"True, very true!" the Lieutenant-Observer who had brought back the challenge was reputed to have retorted. "Not a man among us has ever been degraded, therefore, Herr Supernumerary Officer, you stand alone. And we of the Field Flight do not regard your presence among us as a distinction. You may possibly conceive that?"

He had said it just as though he had had a stink under his nose, according to the narrator. And he had dropped von Herrnung's letter on von Herrnung's table, wiped his fingers ostentatiously upon his handkerchief, given the ghost of a salute—wheeled and gone out. After that the whilom favourite of Fortune had turned sullen and solitary, and developed such desperate recklessness that men funked to fly with him. Subsequently the Bird of War hovering-gear having, after due examination by Government experts, been relinquished to its captor, he had had the mechanism adapted to a Taube monoplane, and thenceforward made Her Dearest the sharer of his flights.

You are to suppose Bawne snatching fearful joys in the realisation of cherished ambitions. Loathing and fearing, he yet admired the big red-haired man, so superbly brave in the air that seemed his natural element. Equally the man, detesting the child, grudgingly acknowledged his courage and obedience. No queerer companionship may have been than this between the Enemy, and the son of Saxham and Lynette.

When the Flight Squadron shifted to Aix-la-Chapelle,

a huge seething caldron of military preparation,—"Does England declare War against us?" people asked the Flight officers. "It is probable," they answered, "*Gott sei danke!*" Upon the Third of August, starting at night, Bawne had made a long flight with the Enemy. At midnight the Taube had hovered over a great, beautiful city twinkling with millions of electric lights.

"That is Brussels you see down there," shouted von Herrnung through the voice-tube. "The city is *en fête* because of the agreement arrived at between the Emperor and the Belgian King. That means England has lost a friend, and made another enemy. Do you understand, little English swine?"

And von Herrnung, who had brought a Wireless outfit, had busied himself in picking up messages from a low-powered installation at the German Embassy and transmitting them to Somebody, high in authority, who waited at Berlin. He had grown more and more peeved as he went about his business, Bawne could not tell why but Franky understood quite well.

Belgium had not been content that the Red Cock should perch upon her British neighbour's roof, while her own house remained unscathed by fire. Franky smiled, knowing this to have been the burden of the song sung by the tuned sparks. Broad day had found the big city humming with mobilisation, enormous placards printed in the National Colours, with: "BELGIUM REFUSES!" and "ROI, LOI, LIBERTÉ," posted in all the public places—and a park of heavy Artillery concentrated round the Etterbeek Barracks, as von Herrnung had flown back to Aix-la-Chapelle on the morning of August 4th.

Bawne went on:

The Flight Squadron had been attached to a Field Artillery Division of the Second Corps, under a General named von Kluck. A huge man he, with a square head and a big mouth full of broken teeth. Bawne had previously seen

him at the Wireless Station where he had been taken on landing from the submarine.

They had seen little of the aviation-base, from the beginning of hostilities. The Powers that Were had promptly taken von Herrnung at his word. For him were the long-distance flights, the delicate and risky missions, the dangerous reconnaissances over the Allied batteries. Driven by that gadfly of desire to regain the lost distinctions, he seemed to have lost all sense of fear and to bear a charmed life.

Thus, while von Kluck's Advance was opposed at Mons by the stubborn thrust of the British Forces, the Buzzard earned his nickname by his tireless quest for Death. It eased his grudge against mankind to hunt men—and he hunted; hovering and observing, wirelessing and spotting, utilising one machine for many purposes,—in those days when War Flying was as yet in its infancy—sniped at by the sharpshooters of four out of seven British Divisions—often waging, with automatic pistol and Krupp machine-gun, fierce battles with other Paladins of the Wing, on the boundless lists of air.

How many times the boy's heart had cried for pity when some brave bird crippled by a spout of lead, or fired by an explosive bullet, had gone spinning earthwards, showing the Three Crosses of the Union Jack, or the blue-white-red circles of France's tricolour—or the red-black-yellow of the Belgian Flag upon its upper and under-wings as it fell.

They had bombed Paris two days before, and bombed Ypres that morning, starting from a Flying Base near the city of Bruges. Bawne knew the place was Ypres because it was marked in red on the roller-map. The British General Headquarters were supposed to be there. All the bombs had been used except two, and the Enemy must have forgotten to get rid of these before he landed. He was generally careful, but not so when he drank much. And lately he had drunk a good deal, there was so much wine in

the country. He had come down and gone into the restaurant to quest for food and champagne. If he found, he would eat hugely and drink heavily, and then sleep himself sober. He always slept after a bout before taking to the air again. But sometimes when he had mixed drinks he got savage instead of sleepy, and then——

"Do you mean that he thrashes you?" Franky interjected here.

"Rather! Just look!"

There were bright red, newly-made weals and brown and purplish old ones on the little muscular, boyish arm from which the speaker stripped the sleeve.

"My back and legs are lots worse," he volunteered with the air of a showman. "I sometimes think he'd like to kill me. But he won't"—the blue eyes were shrewd under the white-streaked forelock—"because of what the Emperor said."

"'Take the boy with you and make of him a decent German.' For fear of your being sent for, he— Yes, I understand! . . . My Christmas!" Franky whispered, opening his haggard eyes, and the fire that burned in them scorched up the water, "If I only had the use of this bashed-up body I'd jolly soon put the fear of God into the howling brute!" His uncertain hand fumbled about the butt of his Webley and Scott revolver. "Shoot him—and make tracks for Headquarters with you in his Taube. Can't fly for monkey-nuts though. Can you?"

"A little." There was a lightening of pleasure in the sombre depths of the blue eyes. "He lets me do plain, straight flying when he's sending Wireless, or photographing or observing. I've never started from the ground yet, or done a landing, though I'm sure I could if I tried. *He* has shown me lots and lots. And I do what he tells me." The forehead knitted under the ragged piebald forelock. "He bluffs about shooting me if I don't obey. But before I drink brandy or do other things that are blackguardly—or

throw bombs on the British and the Allies, he *shall* kill me! I've told him—and he knows I'll keep my word."

"I pipe. And can't you manage to do a flip on your own," came back in the nearly extinguished voice from the sunken chest of the helpless figure on the blood-soaked stretcher. "One o' these fine days when von Thingamy isn't wide? What's to hinder your getting away now and pushing South to meet the British Advance-guard? We blew up the bridge when we left the town, but it's up to you to swim the river. Or cross with a barrel or a plank."

"Yes. And I've often planned to bunk it! But—Man alive!—he's frightfully clever. He knows a Scout sticks to his Word of Honour—and he always asks for my Parole."

"F'f! That's a poser, old son." Franky considered. "If I were in your shoes I'd take to givin' the strictly limited parole. Two hours—or three—or four. . . . There's a chance if the time expires without renewal—of being able to—perpetuate a strictly honourable bunk. So, best Kid, live in hopes and watch out for chances, and one day——"

The speaker's voice trailed off into indistinctness. A deadly vertigo came upon him. He sank amidst swirling waves of grey nothingness, to emerge after æons, to consciousness of the morning sunshine, and the warm rain dropping on his clammy cheek and hand.

"Oh, oh! I thought you were dead!" It was the wailing voice he had heard long ages back. "Like all the other people . . . The poor men and women and the little children——"

"Dead! Not a bit of it! Only shamming for a drink." Frankly whispered, as the cup with its blessing of cool water revisited his baked lips: "Look here. Where did you tell me your Flying Devil was?"

The boy said, with a scared glance through the breached front wall of the baker's parlour, out into the street where the golden sunshine played upon War's havoc and desolation:

"I said he went into the restaurant in the square where the—the dead people are piled up—to hunt about for wine."

"I remember. What's that?"

The gaunt eyes rolled towards the yawning gap where once had been the window. The white lips whispered, "Did you hear? I'll swear somebody laughed."

Both held their breath. Not a sound reached them except the sliding of some *débris* from a pile of shattered masonry, and the gurgling of the water in the broken street-main. Franky mustered breath and went on:

"And now shake hands and scoot, my son, for this spot isn't healthy. Say 'Good-bye and God bless you!' And—if you didn't mind—you might kiss me"—the uninjured hand lifted clumsily and pointed—"here on my forehead. . . . Steady on! Hold hard! Thumbs up, old man!"

For sobs were racking the thin young frame, and the bright tears were running. He gasped out:

"I—I—can't go away and leave you—to—to die all alone!"

*Die. . . .*

The dreadful word, at last, dropping with a dull shock through the wounded man's consciousness as a heavy stone sinks through deeps of black water. Swirling rings of mist in Franky's brain, threatened to close down and blot out all things. He thrust back the grey menace of unconsciousness with a brave effort, whispering:

"Die. . . . Rats! What are you—talking about? It's me for the gay life every time! All I've—got to do is to lie here—and—wait until they fetch me. . . . They're coming—before to-morrow morning—give you my solemn word!"

"You're sure?"

"Dead sure. Look here—can you remember my name was Norwater? Captain, First Battalion Bearskins Plain?" The stumbling voice went on as the boy nodded: "Well then, I'd like you to put in a word for me when you say

your prayers, sometimes. I might have a little chap of my own, by-and-by, to do that for his Pater. What's this, best child?"

A black wooden Crucifix with the Figure of Our Lord in white plaster was being held close to the dimming eyes.

"It's a Crucifix. I think it must have fallen down from the room that was above here. Won't you keep it—to help you through the night-time—just as the one on my Rosary helps me? . . ."

"Good egg! Do you pray to it—and kiss it?"

"We pray—not to it, but to Our Lord who died for us and lives in Heaven. We kiss it—because even if it isn't pretty it is His Image—and has been blessed by a priest."

"Wipe my mouth first, please. You'll find—hanky in my pocket. Thanks!" He asked, after his discoloured lips had touched the Feet of the Crucified: "Isn't there something one ought to say? A prayer—or something! Not much time now—before they fetch me. Tell quick—what words say!"

"You couldn't have anything better than Our Father. Our Lord made that prayer Himself. But there are lots of others. The little ones are easiest. Say: '*Jesu, have mercy upon me!*'"

The weak voice came stumbling after.

"Jesu, have mercy on me!"

"*Jesu, help me!*"

"Jesu, help me!"

"*O Thou who didst die for sinful men upon the Cross, have mercy upon me a sinner!*"

The glassy eyes stared upwards and past the boy, and a thin scarlet thread began to trickle from the corner of his mouth. . . .

"O Thou who didst die—upon the Cross—mercy—me a sinner!"

The stumbling voice trailed away into silence. The glazing eyes, meeting Bawne's, said plainly: "Now go!"

And as the boy, blind with tears, turned in obedience to their order, a dull flame leaped into them. They had seen the tall half-length of a big man, panoplied in the goggled helmet and pneumatic jacket of the aviator, bulking in the window-gap, even before Bawne knew that the Enemy was there.

## CHAPTER LXIV

### AT SEASHEERE

THE narrow white footpath had suddenly led nowhere. Patrine had found herself standing at the edge of a four-foot bluff, looking down upon a grassy plateau that gently sloped to the brink of the cliffs. A wire fence enclosed an aggregation of stone-grey wooden buildings dominated by a flagstaff and the latticed steel tower of a Wireless installation. The White Ensign flapped lazily from the halyards of the flagstaff, there were three hangars at a little distance away. A row of seaplanes sat on the grass before them, and some figures of men in overalls or the familiar Naval uniform moved in and out and about the machines busily as ants. Where the grassland stopped at the cliff-edge the roofs of other hangars showed, that were built upon the shingle. A little way out beyond the line of foam where the long green lips of the sea mumbled at the wet pebbles, another row of seaplanes lashed to buoys, rocked like gulls drowsing after a gorge of fish. And far out to sea, where the heavy trails of smoke bannering from the funnels of rushing grey hulls betokened the War activities of the Fleet in the Channel, and the conning-towers of big submarines sometimes pretended to be little stocky steamers sitting on the swell, two strange bat-like things rose and circled and swooped, and were hidden in grey-blue mists to rise again, and swoop and circle. . . . And a little dinghy with two blue figures in it was pulling out from the beach in the direction of the anchored planes.

"Beg pardon! But—aren't you Miss Saxham?"

She craned her long neck, looking for the speaker, and found him in a youthful Flight Sub-Lieutenant, who, standing below the grassy bluff, was looking up with very brown

eyes at the tall figure in the narrow skirt of tan, white and rose-pink chequers, the low-cut blouse of guipure lace, and the knitted silk coat of rose-pink. Buckled pumps adorned the well-arched feet, clad with navy blue silk stockings of liberal open-work. She sported a buff sunshade lined with rose, and a hat of rough tan straw, trimmed with quills of navy blue and rose-pink, sat coquettishly on the beech-leaf hair. She gave the boy one of her wide smiles, evading the "Yes" by nodding, and with a cat-like leap and scramble, he was up the grassy bluff and standing before her, blushing and saluting and holding out a scribbled paper-pad.

"For me?"

"For you—if you're Miss Saxham. It's a Wireless came this morning—from your—from a great friend of yours. Somewhere in France."

"Oh—thank you!"

She pulled off a loose buff glove and stretched a large white hand for the paper-pad. The message ran:

"6 *a.m. Now leaving Compiègne for Calais. Seasheere in five hours, barring accident. All my love to you. Alan.*"

And the Lieutenant had thought her pale. . . . She kissed the paper and smiled at him bewilderingly. "Lucky beggar, Sherbrand," thought the Lieutenant. "What a glorious woman!" He extorted from Patrine, who would not be twenty until next August, the penalty for being built on a grander scale than other daughters of Eve. But she was asking:

"Whom have I to thank for bringing Mr. Sherbrand's message?"

"Flight Sub-Lieutenant Dareless—and the thanks are quite on my side." He phrased the trite civility punctiliously, while the bold brown eyes beamed and twinkled: "For you're IT," they said; "just—clippingly—IT!"

"How did you know me?" began Patrine.

"Picked you up through the binnics from the bridge, ten minutes ago." The slim brown hand flourished, indicating a T-square-shaped space of well-watered turf marked off in whitewash lines upon the green aërodrome below. "We call things by their proper names so as not to lose touch, you understand? The short stretch is the Bridge, and the long strip aft at right angles—that's the Quarter-deck. The big hut No. 1 is our Wardroom—the Wing-Commander's cabin is divided off from it. The officers' cabins are in the small hut. No. 2, and the Warrant Officers and men divide No. 3. Of course we keep watches and post sentries—just as if we were at sea. That Territorial on guard near is relieving a man of ours, do you see?" He jerked his chin towards the moving brown figure. "What have we to guard? Oh, well, the hangars, and our Wireless"—another jerk indicating the latticed steel mast surmounting a telegraph hut wedded to a vibrating dynamo-shed. "We get reports from our patrols—most of 'em are fitted with radio-apparatus—and we receive and transmit messages. Long distance? Well, rather! We're frightfully swanky about our Wireless plant. It's Number One, H.P. Not big, but jolly powerful. A——"

Six clear, silvery double-notes had sounded from a brass bell, hung beneath a little white-painted penthouse sitting on the blue strip of shadow on the westward side of the Wardroom hut. The Petty Officer who had rung the bell exchanged a brief word with the Territorial, and went back to the hangars from whence he had emerged. Patrine, with her heart in her mouth, asked the Sub-Lieutenant:

"Was that a signal?"

"Only ship-time," said the brown-eyed one. "Six bells. Eleven A.M. And our man ought to be looming up in sight. He might hit Seasheere now at any minute. In fact, he's nearly an hour late."

"You don't—you don't suppose——?"

Fear had pinched and drawn and bleached her so that she looked forty behind her white veil with blue chenille dragon-flies. Her pale mouth twitched and her black brows knotted over the haunted eyes that strained out to sea. The paper-pad, crunched to a mere wad, dropped from the hand that unconsciously released it. The boy picked it up, thrilled by this peep behind the scenes of another's romance.

"No, no! There's no fear of an accident, Miss Saxham. Perhaps a bit o' engine-trouble—you've got to travel slow-ish if she vibes too much. Or he might have spotted an Aviatik and delayed to have a biff at him—on the princi-ple that ten Hun-birds make an evener bag than nine. We know what a terror he's getting to be with the Maxim. But what puts the fear of God into the flighty Taube quicker than anything is our R.N.A.S. Vickers' gun."

Ah, did he know how horribly he tortured her! But a grey speck showed upon the delicately-misty distance east-wards, growing bigger, coming nearer, putting miles of green white, heaving water under its throbbing engine with effort-less speed. Her glance leaped to Dareless, studying the oncomer between narrowed lids, and the hope that had kindled in her died out as he shook his head.

"One of ours, on the Home-flight from Belgium, Miss Saxham. Your man will pick up much higher, and to the south-east."

And presently the latest type of Fleet hydroplane, a two-seater Batboat carrying two bareheaded young gentlemen, moaned into view, chasing its own wave-skipping, flying shadow at full stretch for the shore, came down in a long mallard-like glide, skidding over the water as the wild-duck does, and in a ruffle of glittering spray, continued the home-journey in the character of a motor-boat.

Then there was a sharp squib-like crack, and from one of the anchored hydroplanes, a rocket went up and burst in a smoke-puff that hung in a little cloud of violet-grey upon the sunny air, and from the hangars on the shingle under the

bluff streamed figures in blue overalls or grimy shirt-sleeves, and cheered and waved, standing ankle-deep in refluent water, topped with creamy sheets of foam. As the Batboat with her joyous navigators rushed spluttering to the shallow anchorage and tied up beside the Station planes, megaphones bellowed, motor-horns tooted, somebody banged on the ship's bell, a cornet struck up "Rule Britannia!" very much out of tune. . . .

"Well done, you two beggars! Oh! well done!" trumpeted Dareless, through his hollowed hands, and turned a beaming face on Patrine to explain that the hatless navigators of the Batboat were Lieutenants of a Flight stationed at Antwerp, and had shared in the Air Raid on the Zeppelin-sheds at Düsseldorf—early on the previous day.

And then a droning song had come drifting down out of the sky to the south-eastward with a buzzing undernote in it that Patrine remembered well. Dareless had lifted his head for a rapid upward reconnaissance, and said with a flash of white teeth in his brown face:

"Thumbs up, Miss Saxham!—this is your particular bird!"

And Patrine had seen, small and high, and shining palely golden in the sunlight, the shape of the biplane that carried her lover, and her heart knocked twice in her bosom, heavily, as they knock behind the curtain before they ring up at the Comédie Française. A Clery's signalling-pistol had cracked and been answered from the Air-Station. Mechanics in overalls had appeared upon the green. Then the buzzing had stopped, and the second Bird of War, rising higher to escape the backwash of light airs from the cliffs, had launched into a splendid sweeping spiral, ending in a long glide, and alighted on the well-rolled Station aërodrome —and Sherbrand had come home.

Surely never until the thought of Flight,—formed in the brain-cells of Man and fertilised by the lust of Adventure,—hatched out in the Bird that bears the Knight of To-day

upon the air-path, did lover return to his lady after a fashion so wonderful as this.

The Flying Men have always been coming. In the Book of Books you will read of them. Ecclesiasticus, the Preacher, foretold of the day when a Bird of the Air should carry the Voice, and That Which Hath Wings should tell the matter; and how these Winged ones rush and roar through the prophetic pages of Ezekiel and Daniel, you have but to open them to learn. Their shapes like locusts, their armoured bodies with great-eyed headpieces "like those of horses prepared unto battle," the noise made by their wings in flight "like the noise of chariots and horses running to battle," the wheels beneath their wings, the human faces appertaining to them, the inward fire that issues from them in scorching vapours,—are described with fiery eloquence in the Apocalypse of the Apostle of St. John, when the Fifth Angel sounds the Trumpet, and the King whose name is Exterminans, the Destroyer, reaches the culminating point of his terrific reign upon earth.

Flight makes the world no more joyful, being mainly used for purposes of destruction, but nothing can rob the Flying Man of his shining gloriole of Romance. The boy who was building toy aëroplanes of card and elastic a few years back has rediscovered the Flying Dragon of the Cretaceous period, broken and tamed the winged monster into a War steed, and thundered down the forgotten roads of the Pterodactyl and the Rukh, to reap shining honours upon the battlefields of the mutable Air. And if the girl who chafied the boy of old worships him to-day as St. George, Sir Lancelot, Sir Galahad, and Le Bon Sieur de Bayard rolled into one, who shall blame her? Not I, for one!

In the instant of reunion, when the tall brown figure came swinging to meet her, and the strong hard hands gripped her own, Patrine loved him more than ever. Sherbrand's was not a romantic greeting, but it thrilled her nevertheless.

"They've asked us to lunch here, but it's ready at the Cottage. Shall we accept? It's for you to decide."

His tone had indicated his keen desire for the *tête-à-tête* in preference. Disappointment had shadowed his clear eyes when Patrine had voted for luncheon at the Air Station, inwardly longing to be alone with him—to be alone.

And yet, despite the longing, the haunting sense of a sword of Fate hanging over her, Patrine found the Ward-room lunch a jolly banquet. They were so young, those sunburnt faces, laughing about the plainly-furnished board. The Wing-Commander in charge of the Station proved to be something under thirty. To Patrine, occupying the place of honour on his right hand, he did the honours like a veteran. One of the navigators of the Batboat sat upon her other side, and Sherbrand was her *vis-à-vis*.

Sherbrand was altered. She knew him older, harder, sterner. . . . Thinner to the verge of haggardness, with a deep vertical furrow graved between the thick eyebrows that made a bar of blonde fairness against the red of his deeply-burned skin. He had gone away a splendid youth. Now he returned with two silvery-yellow stars on the cuffs and shoulder-straps of his khaki tunic, a man seasoned and tempered as a bar of steel in the furnace-blast of War.

The pleasant meal ended, and the jolly party broke up. Their hosts accompanied them to the gate of the Station enclosure, and the warmth and heartiness of Naval tradition had been in the farewells that had sped the departing guests upon their way:

"*Au revoir!* All happiness!"

"So-long! We'll look after the 'plane all right!"

"*Adios! Buenas noches!*"

"*Sayonara!*"

"*Siéda!*"

"Good-bye and good luck! Now all together. . . . Hip—hip—" and a rousing British cheer.

## CHAPTER LXV

### GOOD-BYE, DEAR LOVE, GOOD-BYE!

THEY had looked back to smile and wave their thanks, and an aged tennis-shoe, scientifically hurled by Dareless, had knocked the cap out of Sherbrand's upraised hand, and raised a cloud of chalky dust from the surface of the sunken road. Under cover of this they had crossed the road and climbed a slope together and found themselves standing in heavenly loneliness, with the sea beside them and their feet upon the thymy grasses blotted by the short shadows of their tall figures, under the almost vertical sun.

"Look!" Sherbrand had said, pointing to a whitewashed, red-tiled cottage cuddled in a hollow some quarter of a mile distant, girt with a gay frivolous little garden full of bachelor's buttons and sunflowers, lavender bushes and nasturtiums yellow and red. He slipped his hand within her arm and pressed it, whispering: "There's our Eden—and my dream has come true!"

Her heart choked her. They moved on together shoulder to shoulder, her elbow resting in the bend of his strong arm, and her hand lying in his. The air they breathed was sweet with heady, nameless fragrance, the burning golden light that haloed them seemed the effluence of their love. Anguish and rapture mingled in the chalice of the perfect hour for Patrine. Nothing but rapture was in the draught for Sherbrand, though a faint fold showed between his eyebrows as he said suddenly:

"Hang it! I've forgotten to ask the Station fellows to give me a night's shakedown. However, there's a decent hotel in Seasheere. My bag is still in the machine, by the

way. . . . Did you send someone on to the cottage with your traps?"

"I——"

She began to falter. It was coming. . . . But his eagerness delayed the moment of revelation. The track they followed dipped down and they found themselves in a grassy basin. The turf cupped up on every side and they were alone, lidded by the blazing turquoise sky.

At the bottom of the green nest he stopped, and next moment his embrace enveloped her. She forgot, as an answering flame burned in her blood, all the things that she had meant to say. "I'll have my hour," shot through her whirling brain, "I must have something of him to keep in remembrance. He has never loved me—nor I him—so passionately as now. Oh, my God!"

He released her with a happy sigh, and they sat down on the shadowed side of their green nest, a deep dimple in the cheek of the sunny, smiling Earth, and looked in each other's eyes. He said, as she took off her hat and threw it aside and turned her unveiled, unshadowed face back to his:

"Your dear cheeks are thinner, I fancy, Pat. Have you been worrying much about me?"

She nodded, thinking of her sleepless nights passed after reading his few letters, or when his letters had failed to come.

"Pretty badly—in the days of the Retreat from Mons. You piloted that French officer over the Channel and—whiff!—you vanished. What has become of him?"

"Wing Commandant Raymond? He's riding the storm and directing the whirlwind somewhere on the French Front. I got my orders to join the R.F.C.-unit acting with a rearguard battery of the Second Army Corps as soon as I'd dumped him. As for the work with the battery, it was always the same thing. We flew out against von Kluck's advance, spotting their gun-emplacements and getting the range for our gunners. And under us a dark-brown river

with five branches rolled South. And that was the Retreat."

His arm was round her, her cheek was pressed to his, her bosom heaved against him. She turned her lips to his in a quick kiss, and whispered:

"And when you came down out of your sky 'like pigeons homing at nightfall'—that's a sentence in one of your letters—d'you recognise it?—the river went on rolling still?"

"Just the same, without a break. And what a—welter. Remnants of crack infantry brigades tangled with the rags of cavalry squadrons—grimy, hairy, ragged chimney-sweeps with bandaged feet and empty bellies, and blackened tongues hanging out, and blind, blank, staring eyes. . . . Imagine all the toy soldier outfits in the kiddy-shops of Regent Street emptied into the gutters and you'll get an idea of what the thing was like. . . . And Transport and Supply-columns jumbled with bits of R.G.A. batteries and R.F.A.—three dying horses to a howitzer, and one gunner left out of six! Bands of refugees and troops of stragglers. Lunatics led along howling and gibbering. Lorries, carts, and motor-vans crammed with swollen-footed cripples—cheek by jowl with bloody spectres evacuated from Field Hospitals that were reddening the sky with their burning in the rear. A day-and-nightmare to haunt one for ever if the end had been different—" He caught his breath. "But when I remember that we straightened the muddle—brought Order out of Chaos—turned on the Germans and bit to the bone—I pray that the memory may stay with me always, so that I may teach your sons and mine what it means to be Englishmen!"

"Oh, Alan! My poor boy! . . ." She caught him in her arms with sudden passion, strained him to her and then freed herself from him, and moved away, signing to him that he must not approach. "What you hope for can never be! I'd have told you this before if I'd been decent, but I wanted

your kisses—I was hungry for the touch of you—and the sound of your voice in my ears after all these weeks and weeks——"

"Then why do you say it can never be—and tell me in the same breath that you long for me and love me?" His light brows were drawn into a heavy line over his stern grey eyes. "Aren't you and I going to be married? Is it possible that you'd draw back—*now?*"

"Because your wife should be a pure woman, and I am not, it is possible. Don't move! Don't come nearer! If you do I'll never have the courage to tell—what must be told!"

And he had sat still, as a figure in carved khaki-coloured stone with his knees apart and his knotted hands hanging between them, and his eyes, curiously hard and pale against the strong red sunburn of his face, fixed immovably upon her mouth. When she ended there had been a great silence; and she had looked up at the azure dome lidding their green nest, wondering why the burning, perfumed breeze had suddenly turned cold. His voice recalled her:

"Why have you told me this?"

"To be honest." She hugged her knees. "To give you a chance for freedom before you were handicapped with me for life, poor boy!"

"And how do you suppose it makes me feel?" He breathed roughly, and gritted his teeth, wringing his hands in one another so strongly that the knuckles started death-white against the reddened skin. She heard herself saying lamely:

"I knew you'd be horribly sick about it and hate me!"

"I don't hate you. But I want to kill *him!* He took you to that damnable place and—" He bit his lip and swallowed. "How long was that before I met you at Hendon? Three days—and our day of meeting—the meeting I thanked God for!—was July 18th. This is Octo-

ber—the 14th—to be particular. You must know what I'm driving at. Is there—any danger——"

She said in a level voice, looking at him steadily:

"I have deserved it—but I think God is going to be kinder to me than to—punish me in that way." Her eyes flickered and fell from his. "It was because—I was so awfully afraid at first that I made up my mind to marry you. And now—and now you know the very worst of me."

"Hardly the worst." He drew breath roughly, and the cloud upon his forehead lightened a little. "We'd have been man and wife before I flew for France—if you'd let me have my way. Why didn't you?"

"I— Oh!—It seemed so mean. . . . A kind of child-stealing. You were so unsuspecting, and so generous, and so *clean!*" She bit her lips, and the tears welled over her underlids. . . . "You shamed me into being straight with you. I'd loved you from the beginning. But it was as though my love had left off crawling and grown a pair of wings."

"Answer me straight." He turned so as to face her. "Did you ever love that German?"

"To my shame be it spoken—never for an instant! After that night at the Upas I hated him unspeakably. Only when I thought he was dead, I began to let up a little on the hate."

He looked at his hands and unknotted them and knotted them, and said suddenly:

"You may be interested to know that he is not dead, but very much the other thing. He is scouting and spotting for von Kluck's gunners on their south and west Fronts, and sometimes bombing positions he has skried out—and doing it all superbly, damn him! He has been degraded to the rank of a Supernumerary Flying officer for some breach of duty that got to the Kaiser. And he has evidently made his mind up to make good in this War. They pick him for all the dangerous missions. He seems unkillable—and we've

tried our hardest. And wherever he goes—until now I've kept this from you—he takes—the Saxhams' son!"

"Bawne! . . ."

She shaped the name dumbly, with lips that were pale as poplar leaves. "God forgive me!" her conscience whispered. "How little I have thought of Bawne!"

"Yes. I mean Bawne!"

So odd was the contrast between the speaker's grim, set face and the bald simplicity of his language, that her white lips twitched with a crazy desire to laugh, as he added:

"I've been keen for a long time on coming across the man who pinched my hawk-hoverer and kidnapped my friend's son—and putting the fear of God into him with an automatic revolver, or a Maxim. . . . But now that I know—this!"—the deadly contempt in the voice is inconveyable—"a clean death hardly meets his case. Good cartridges seem wasted in killing that fellow. One wants to set one's heel down—hard on him—and scrunch!"

He had sat silent, staring before him yet a moment longer. Then he gathered himself together and got up from the grass, glanced at his wrist-watch and said, holding out his hand to assist her in rising:

"Well, let's be going. It's half-past three. They'll expect us to tea at the cottage. By the way, you haven't told me. Did you send on your bag from the station when you came?"

She shuddered violently, and leaped up without touching the offered hand. The west was all dappled with tiny pearly cloudlets, their shadows were lengthening momentarily, the salt smell of the sea was on the breeze that came in languid puffs. But the wine of joy that had brimmed their green bowl had been emptied out by her own hand, and the draught now held to her flinching mouth was bitterer than hemlock and blacker than Styx. That change in his face and voice—

"What do you suppose? I brought no bag. I am going

home by the next train." She glanced at a little jewelled wrist-watch he had given her and back at the mask-like face, that said:

"You mean we part here, for good! Is that it?"

"For good—or bad. My poor boy——"

He put her "poor boy" from him with a gesture of the hand. He asked in a flat, toneless voice:

"Am I a blackguard like von Herrnung? You came down here to marry me. What will be said afterwards—if——"

"I'm past caring what people think or say!" she flashed at him angrily. "I've told you that I will not marry you! —that I'm not fit to be your wife. Oh! if you suppose it didn't hurt——"

A rush of tears drowned out his altered visage. She turned away, fighting for composure, summoning all her woman's pride to help her at her need. That swaying grace, that alluring physical perfection—had never appealed to Sherbrand's senses so irresistibly. . . .

"Patrine!"

She heard his eager footsteps following her. She was snatched into his masterful embrace, assailed by his stormy kisses, wooed by his passionate words of love beyond her power to resist. The flood in the veins of both was rising, the force of the warm rushing torrent was bearing them away, she cared not whither, so that she might keep those arms about her still.

"Patrine! My woman of women—do you think I'd let you go from me? Not I! I'll have you for my wife whether you will or no! We'll forget—all that! We'll be happy in spite of it. Won't we?"

"No!" she gasped out.

"We will, I tell you!" He laughed out with ringing triumph and bent his head, seeking her evasive mouth with his own. Hard pressed she had panted:

"Don't ask me to marry you! I'd never, never do it!

Unless you were poor and sick and a nobody—and wanted a woman to nurse and work for you. . . . Then—the wag of a finger or the wind of a word would bring me to you. But—I swear it before God!—I won't marry you as you are!"

"You will!"

"I've sworn I won't. But—" She had whispered it in a kiss of fire—"I will give you—what that other man took!"

And Sherbrand had uttered a hoarse sound like a sob, and unwound her arms from about his neck, and said, holding her hands close in his and looking sternly in her swimming eyes:

"I'm no saint, God knows!—but I'm a better man than to take what you offer. Halloa! That's Davis. What's up now?"

A distant whistle had made him prick his ears. He whistled back and ran lightly up to the brink of the grassy punch-bowl in time to meet the little black-avised Welshman—hero of the Paris episode in connection with the girl with the goo-goo eyes. Davis had handed him a paper-pad. Sherbrand had read it, scrawled a reply on the blank side to be dispatched by the Station's Wireless, and hurried back to Patrine.

"We—couldn't have been married to-morrow anyway. The man who undertook to replace me while I went on leave has been killed doing reconnaissance on our new Front in North-West France. I'm recalled."

"Recalled?"

He nodded. The British Force had been deftly transferred from its position on the Aisne to a base at St. Omer, you will remember, thus blocking the Calais Gate. The New Offensive was taking shape. Sherbrand had continued:

"So—if you're to catch the three-fifty from Fearnchurch to Charing Cross—we'll have to run!"

And as the screech of a distant engine had sounded from the direction of Fearnchurch Station, he had caught up

the veiled hat and thrust it upon Patrine, grabbed her thin rain-coat and vanity bag and sunshade, and hurried her back to the flinty railway-station by the way she had come. And with the banging of the carriage-door, her woman's heart had broken. She had felt it bleeding drip, drip, drip! as Sherbrand's tall bare head and grave sad eyes had receded out of sight.

And the train had been delayed at the next station, waiting for the passage of a troop-train crammed with eager faced young men of Kitchener's Army, concrete answers to the famous Call to Arms and the First Five Questions—nearly half an hour. So that rounding the curve beyond the last signal-cabin for the clanking journey through the short tunnel, Patrine had seen, some miles to seaward of the glittering white prow of the North Foreland, a biplane with its wings reddened by the sunset, flying south-east.

"Oh! good-bye, Alan!" she had whispered, knowing that she would never see her Bird of War again. He had been caught and dragged back into the fiery whirl of the cyclone without the hope that nerves and supports and brings adventurers back. Sorrowful and stern, baulked of his heart's desire, grimly bent on meeting von Herrnung, and wreaking retribution for a horrible wrong, upon the red head of the Kaiser's Flying Man.

## CHAPTER LXVI

### MORE KULTUR

THE boy's slight figure seemed to shrink upon itself as the stony eyes looked at him, and the teeth showed under the red moustache, not tightly curled now, but stiffened and pointing to the eyes. Von Herrnung set a foot upon the broken wall and leaped into the baker's parlour, staggering slightly as he alighted amongst the rubbish on the broken floor. He had been drinking, but not to excess, for the restaurant-cellars having been thoroughly gutted by his countrymen, the wreckage of the bar behind which Madame had sat, busy with her embroidery, had yielded barely a half-tumbler of Cognac and a single bottle of Champagne.

Having drunk enough to spur memory and not to lull his snarling grievances to slumber, he had come forth to blunt the tooth of his bitter hatred on the boy. For, since that queer tickling, pleasurable sensation experienced in his first tantalization of Bawne's hunger, every new weal marked upon the wincing body, every fresh bruise inflicted on the shuddering soul of Her Dearest, imparted to von Herrnung a ferocious pleasure in comparison with which mere vicious indulgence palled.

"So, there you are, little English pig-dog," he said in German, as the blue eyes met his own and fell away before them and the colour sank out of the young face. "Get you back to the *Market-platz* there and wait for me. I have some business with your friend."

He stretched out a long arm, picked up the boy by the slack of his garments, and with a turn of the wrist dropped him into the street. His ears were pricked for the cry that should follow the slight scrambling fall of the light body on

the rubbish. It failed to come, and he frowned. Presently — Meanwhile here was game of a larger kind. He looked down from his superb height upon the bloodstained figure in the stretcher. Its eyes were closed, and the haggard face beneath the grime and bristles had the yellowish-white of old wax. He spoke to it harshly, in his English, and the brownish lids split apart and the gaunt sick eyes glimmered up at him. But no reply came from the livid lips. He rapped his foot sharply on the floor, repeating:

"I suppose you know you are my prisoner, sir?" and a strange spasm of mingled amusement and irony twitched the muscles of the haggard mask. The faded negatives of eyes regarded him with the ghost of a smile in them. The dissolving voice said in tones no louder than a sigh:

"Possibly. But not—for long!"

The voice stopped short. As von Herrnung took a step nearer to the stretcher, his toe stubbed against and caught in the strap of a leather case lying on the littered floor. He picked up the case and smiled as he drew out a costly pair of Zeiss binoculars. His own, though hailing from the Jena workshop, only magnified to 12 x. These registered 25 x. On the metal rim of the larger lense was engraved the style and title of the owner: "Capt. Rt. Hon. Viscount Norwater, Royal Bearskins Plain."

A find in the dual sense. He restored the binoculars to their case, unbuckled the strap and slipped it under his heavy bandolier of cartridges, hanging the case beside his own, loosened the upper stud-clips that fastened his goggled helmet, and pushed it back so as to reveal his whole face. The gaunt eyes were open, looking at him attentively. He asked them:

"May it not be that we have met before In Paris, yes? On the night of the Grand Prix. At the Hotel Spitz, *ja, ja, gewiss!* A dinner given by Sir Thomas Brayham for Lady Wathe and a few friends. You were one of the friends. I another. How is the old woman, do you know?"

*Kreutzdonnerwetter!* what inconceivable insolence! The eyes looked through him as though he had not been there. His hard blue eyes, already injected with blood, grew savage, and a purplish tinge suffused his florid skin. He reflected an instant, pulled a capacious silver spirit-flask from the deep side-pocket of his pneumatic, half-filled the drinking cup that capped it, and knelt down beside the stretcher, saying quite pleasantly, in his gutturals:

"See, here is some capital Cognac. Let me give you a sip, eh? Then you will feel better." He poured a dram between the teeth, and waited through a spasm of coughing, wiped the blood and mucus from the gasping lips with a rag of the torn clothing, then pulled a stool from amongst the rubbish, sat down near the feet of the wounded man, facing him, and took a long pull of the belauded brandy from the neck of the big flask.

"That does more good than canteen coffee," he said, and sucked his red moustache appreciatively. He set down the flask on the floor between his feet, found his case, and carefully chose a cigar.

"A zigarre? No! You will, then, perhaps not object to my smoking? We of the Field Flight have to comfort ourselves with snuff when in the air. To burn tobacco and blaze up like a star-shell and come down like a charred rocket-stick, that is not at all agreeable or *praktisch*. *Sapperlot!* you are not a very amusing companion. Nevertheless, my fellow, I drink to your jolly good health!"

He knocked off the ash of his cigar, cleared his throat, and spat, just clearing Franky's shoulder. The flicker of anger in the sunken eyes brought a glitter of malice into his own. He sent out a long swaggering stream of smoke, and knocked the ash from his cigar with the little finger of his ringed left hand, continuing:

"You see, I have cut the long thumb-nail that amused you when we met in Paris. The Day has come—though you would not join me in drinking to its dawning!—and the

German eagle has dipped his claws in English blood. We Prussians have beaten out the iron sceptre of World Power with giant blows upon the War Anvil, and the sun that never set upon the swanky British Empire, has already risen to find the Roast Beef of Old England in danger, and the Triple Entente a bankrupt syndicate." He shrugged and twisted his red moustache, tilted his big body sidewise, and spat at a carefully-calculated angle, missing the other shoulder of the victim as he pursued:

"But you do not know . . . *Donnerwetter!* how should you?—lying here like a stuck pig! Yesterday—in the neighbourhood of Ypres—took place the ultimate, conclusive battle, in which the German mammoth pounded the British Lion into pulp. Your little British Expeditionary Force may be said to exist no longer. Your Brigade of Guards, who boast that, like the Samurai, they do not surrender while yet unwounded, is practically extinct. Maddened by despair the officers shot the few men who remained and then blew one another's brains out. Your Commander-in-Chief is our prisoner, Sir Rothesay Craig has been killed, also General Callonby and General Jones-Torrian. The French Generalissimo has surrendered, with the 5th French Army. The 6th French Army has been chopped into sausage-meat. So, all is over! Total Kaput!"

"If what you say is Gospel," said the weak voice, and the faded eyes had the ghost of a smile in them, "why do I keep on hearing our guns?"

For the hurly-burly of battle in the South had broken out afresh as though in contradiction. The crazy floor vibrated, the tottering walls shook with the distant fury of sound:

*Thud—thud—thud—thud!* and the muffled *Boom!—Crash!* of immense explosions. And through all the steady slogging of Royal Garrison Artillery howitzers, and the tireless, dogged hammering of Field Artillery eighteen-pounders.

"*Macht nicht!*"

Von Herrnung shrugged contemptuously, though his keen ear did not miss the fact that the guns were coming nearer: "That must go on—for a little!—until the last show of resistance is broken down. If it be a military virtue not to be aware when you are beaten—your big-jawed, dull-brained, short-headed British bull-dogs of soldiers have that virtue, of course. But comes the awakening! The Russian Navy has been blown off the Baltic, the Czar has accepted our Kaiser's ultimatum—the Belgian Government has made its submission—the Belgian Army has laid down its arms. Our 17-inch siege-howitzers are bombarding the shores of England from their emplacements at Calais. The Army of Invasion is embarking—your British Navy—the floating bulwark of your Empire—lies at the bottom of the North Sea. Ministers run from one end of England to the other, begging, coaxing, persuading—your proletariat. There is panic in the English War Office, and despair at Buckingham Palace; rebellion in the streets of London, *débâcle* in the City, and stampede in the West End. To-morrow the Emperor of Greater Germany and the Crown Prince, Viceroy of the Brito-German Possessions, will, with the Empress enter Paris. Ten miles of films will record for all Posterity this colossal and magnificent scene. The London pageant of triumph follows. Well may you weep, my unlucky fellow, over the collapse and ruin of your proud country"—for tears were really trickling from the puckered eyelids of the now flushed and quivering face. "*Himmelkreuzbombenelement!* You are not weeping. You are laughing, you dirty English swine!"

"What else do you—expect—when you're so—dashed amusin'?" gasped Franky painfully. "Roll along with some more of it—why don't you, Anatole?"

"You do not believe me, no? You think that I am rotting," von Herrnung shrugged his huge shoulders and

the German Field Artillery was becoming intermittent. The slogging of the British had increased in energy.

A flare of red spurted into the Kaiserman's pasty cheeks, and his hard eyes lighted eagerly. He forgot his rule of sleeping off liquor before again taking to the air. With a confidence in his own powers largely justified by his successes, his mind leaped to the scene of conflict. Now, when the German batteries were weakening, was the moment for the arrival of a pilot-aviator of the Imperial Field Flight, skilled as aërial observer and signaller, and known to be indifferent to risk.

Here was the chance one had hoped for. Restitution of the forfeited decoration. Restoration to the Emperor's favour. Reinstatement in the lost place upon the regimental roster. Promotion—the bestowal of new honours—danced before him like little, gaudy demons, drowning with their buzz the voice of prudence, luring him to the essay.

"I am compelled to leave you now, Norwater," he said smilingly to the man on the stretcher; "thanks so much for our interesting chat! I shall carry away a pleasant recollection, and leave you also a memento in the shape of a bomb, which I shall drop on you when I have climbed to a suitable height. So *Gut Abend, Alter junge.* Though before I go there is a trifling formality——"

He knelt down by the stretcher, and without unnecessary gentleness rifled the pockets of the wounded man. The victim had swooned when von Herrnung rose, transferring to his own person a small purse, heavy with English sovereigns, and a pigskin case full of crisp French banknotes, with a thin gold wrist-watch that had a luminous dial, and a coroneted monogram upon the back.

Sheer waste, according to the German War Book, issued by the Great Staff for the use of German officers, to leave upon the person of the fallen opponent articles likely to be of use to the conqueror. He rinsed his hands in the water-can, and dried them on his clothing, pulled up his helmet,

fastened it, and buttoned his pockets, straightened his bandolier, nodded pleasantly at the reflection of his giant person in the skewed wall-mirror, jumped lightly through the window-gap, and went upon his way.

The slight figure lying so still upon the stretcher had never been remarkable for beauty of proportion. The sharpened face with its hue of old wax, the discoloured stains and the hair and grime upon it, had never been handsome even in health. But thrown back and tilted upwards, with the rosy glow of the setting sun touching the high brow, and violet shadows framing the sealed eyelids and close-shut mouth, it did not lack the quality of nobility. There was something knightly about the still form.

He revived to pain and loneliness and burning thirst, the squalor and abomination of desolation, the louder, nearer thudding of the German drum-fire, and the dogged reply of the unweakening British guns. He might have deemed the events that had taken place illusions born of weakness and fever, but for the testimony of the looking-glass that hung away upon the wall. There was the familiar vista of the Market Square, with the charred ruins of Town Hall and Clock Tower, yet sending up thin columns of bluish smoke into the radiant air. You could even make out a corner of the great stack of stiffened, blackening bodies. Nothing was wanting but that the Taube should still be resting on the cobblestones like a drowsy white vampire-bat glutted with human blood.

But the Taube was not there. From high overhead the buzzing note of the hoverer came down to Franky. He could see through the rents in the penthouse of broken flooring the white, winged shape hanging poised overhead. He even fancied he could descry the helmeted, goggled head of von Herrnung peering over the bulwarks of the bird-body, the jut of his elbow and the pear-shaped wire cages in which the bombs hung ready to his hand.

The thought of Margot and the child was an exquisite agony. The thirst for life, delectable life, revived in Franky ragingly. In dreadful expectation of the deafening crash, and the rending pang, and the burning bite of the greenish flame, the haggard eyes were straining upwards, when the terror went out of them, and their lids flickered down. . . .

Let the fellow do his worst. Where was the good of hating? Christ had prayed for His murderers when they nailed Him on the Tree. The numb hand feebly made the Sacred Sign, and the tension passed with the terror. . . .

There was a dull boom high overhead, and some heavy objects fell in a neighbouring backyard. Little bits of metal rattled on Franky's plank penthouse, and some warm drops pattered on Franky's face and wetted the hand that lay upon his breast. Not rain, but something sticky and thick, with a sickly, well-known odour. He lifted the hand. Oh, horrible! The heavens were raining blood.

Too weak to even guess at what had happened, he fell again into a stupor. The hollowed chest heaved at longer intervals beneath the First Aid bandaging over which had been thrown the khaki coat. Long cold breaths expired through the panting nostrils, the eyes showed a glassy line of white between the parted lids. He was dreaming. . . .

Dreaming of being borne along in a shadowy boat under starless skies, through clear lucent darkness, over another darkness unfathomable, and yet diamond-clear. Perhaps no more water than the atmosphere above it was air, both possibly, elements unknown. . . . The boat crowded with seated shapes, three of them feminine. . . . A tall, black-hooded, black-mantled figure in the sternway seemed to impel the vessel with a single oar.

"Is this stuff water?"

The quiet voice of a man seated beside Franky had asked the question. Franky slipped his hand over the boat's low side and withdrew it shining, but not dripping, thinking:

"It is and it isn't. Fairly odd! Wonder where we're bound for? That fellow sculling. . . . Reminds me of old Charon, in the Sixth *Æneid*, when I swotted Virgil at School."

"Me too!" Thought seemed to pass current as speech, for though Franky had not voiced his reflection, the tall man who sat next him had answered instantly:

"But if this is the Ninefold—what about the '*cold and venomous waters, consuming iron and breaking the rarest vessels.*'" The speaker dipped his hand over the side and brought it up all shining but not dripping, and touched his lips with it, and went on, smiling: "Besides, if you and I are alive, where are our golden boughs, and if we're dead, where are our oboli? We ought to have 'em! It wouldn't be good form not!"

"Why, you're Braythwayte of Ours! How is it I didn't know you? Why did I suppose—" Franky broke off, for Braythwayte's very recent exit from the stage of life had been performed after a highly coloured fashion, when the Germans had showered heavy shells of high explosive upon the little Belgian town. "That fellow sculling," he said to cover the slight embarrassment. "Somehow I fancy I've seen him before."

"Ah! Now I recollect." Braythwayte was answering the thought of the previous moment. "I did get crumped up pretty badly. Should have come off lots worse hadn't it been for Cruse. He threw himself in front of me when the shell dropped so near us." He spoke of the Sergeant-Major of his Company who had been killed at the same moment. "Don't you recognise him? Cruse is the man who's sculling. I caught a glimpse of his face just now—it can be nobody but Cruse."

"Beggin' yer pard'n, Sorr." The soft South Irish brogue sounded more apologetic than contradictory. The thick, sturdy figure of the speaker, uncertainly descried in the clear obscurity, leaned anxiously over from the opposite seat.

"'Tis Father Walsh—may Those Above reward him for an ould, bould gentleman!—that kem crawlin' out on his four bones to the Advanced threnches at a place they did be callin' La Bossy or suchlike—to give Holy Absolution to meself and Hanlon an' two other boys av' the Loyal Irish Rifles that wor' in a bad way. Wouldn't I swear to his skin on a gate, or the bend of his beak anywhere"—the voice hesitated—"barrin' for the mimmory I have that Thim Wans was afther pluggin' him through the head—and himself just layin' the Blessed Sacrament on me tongue!"

"Beg pardon." A woman's voice joined in the conversation. 'Sorry to interrupt, but I know him, really. It isn't the Surgeon-Major—or Father Anybody!" Franky recognised in the clear obscurity the flowing white headdress and grey Red-Cross badged cape of an Army Nursing Sister, as she went on: "It's just our Civil Surgical Specialist—who died of double pneumonia (septic) at the Harfleur Military Hospital. Had a touch of influenza—and would get out of bed to operate on one of the Sisters—a sudden case of appendix trouble with typhoid thrown in. Oh, yes! the operation was successful, but the Sister didn't recover. Still, the C.S.S. gave his life for hers all the same!"

"Good egg, him! But are you quite sure there's no mistake with regard to our friend there?" Franky nodded towards the tall, black-hooded, black-mantled figure plying the oar, upright in the stern. "Because just now I caught a glimpse of his face, and I could have sworn it was my grandfather—by a long sight the finest man I've ever come across! He dived over the yacht's side and saved my life when I was drowning. It was the Cowes Season of 1894. I was a cheeky nipper of eight—and he was seventy-one. And the chill and the excitement brought on a stroke or something. He was dead in his cabin-berth next morning, when his man went in with the mail."

"Oh, you funnies!" This with a clear little trill of laughter in the voice of a small girl—Franky could see her

bright eyes dancing as she peeped at him from her niche between the Army Nurse and the small, black-habited elderly figure of a Sister of Charity in a deep starched *guimpe* and wide-flanged cornette. "As if it could be anybody but my Dada—who pulled the soldiers out of the train that was all smashed up and burning! When me and Mummy——"

"*Taisez vous donc, Raymonde!*" whispered the nun reprovingly. "It is not *convenable* that *petites demoiselles* should interrupt their elders thus. Remember where you are, and in what Presence!"

"Please don't scold her!" coaxed Franky, the devout lover of children. The nun smiled, meeting his entreating eyes. He smiled back and went on: "Right or wrong—we seem all agreed that our friend in the stern is a near relation —or a close acquaintance of nearly every one of us. In every case a supreme benefactor——"

"Surely, monsieur!" she gave back in a hushed tone. "But surely, monsieur! The Helper—the Benefactor of us all!"

As the keel grated on unseen bottom, she folded her hands with a beautiful devoutness, and sank upon her knees, drawing with her the child. The man of the Loyal Irish followed her example. Franky found himself kneeling with the others—and as the boat's prow ploughed into sand or shingle, and the Ferryman, shipping his oar, moved shorewards with a shepherding gesture, the voyagers rose with a thrill of expectancy, and followed with one accord.

He stepped ashore—dropping the great black mantle—turned and faced them, spreading out His Arms. Beauty Divine, glory unspeakable——

## CHAPTER LXVII

### THE QUESTION

"HAVE I been honest?" Patrine asked herself over and over, kneeling by the open window, staring into the darkness. "Have I been just towards the man who never was a friend even when he played the lover? Did not my own attitude of cynical curiosity towards secret, hidden things, bias his line of conduct towards me? Might not even von Herrnung have respected a girl who showed no inclination to flutter moth-like, about the flaming torch of Sin? No! he would not. But I could have saved myself even from scorching—I, who approached the flame too closely, and shall carry the scars of my burning to the grave."

Drip, drip, drip! Water, oozing from the box that stood upon the table, was dropping on the carpet with the small, insistent sound. . . . At the west end of the Catholic Church where Patrine had told her story to a priest in the Confessional there was a great black Crucifix, bearing a white thorn-crowned Figure gashed with gory-seeming wounds. She had fancied that the blood from them dripped down upon the pavement as she had sat staring at the High Altar, and wondering whether it were true that wilful sin committed by men and women for whose salvation Christ had bled and died might not cause Him suffering even now?

She had been willing to sin for Sherbrand, and said so in her hour of madness. Yet the renunciation of her lover as a husband had been an act of the purest love. Perhaps God would overlook the one thing for the sake of the other? Perhaps He had really spoken by the mouth of that old priest whose tears had dropped upon his withered hands. . . .

Drip, drip, drip! Patrine began to suspect the source

whence the sound proceeded. The people who had packed the roses—they must be roses—had wetted the cotton-wool too heavily, the fools! The inlaid table and the carpet would suffer if the wet were not mopped up. One ought to ring for Mrs. Keyse or Janey, or better still, see to it oneself.

She half-rose with this intention, then sank down again nervelessly. It was half-past ten. The October night leaned close over London, Harley Street was muffled in velvet darkness. The veiled gleam of electric lights showed at its junction with Cavendish Square. The rumble of the tube train came from Portland Place, the faint shriek of the Northern Express sounded from Euston. A Brocken Hunt of motor-buses screeched and clanked up the Marylebone Road and faded into distance. The rumble and roar of Oxford Street showed signs of diminution. It was possible to hear stray sentences spoken by people passing upon the pavement below.

"I don't care!" This from the shorter of two female figures that had halted before the house. The edge of light-coloured skirt showing below her cloak, and the gleam of white cuffs framing the gloved hands with which she gestured, suggested a Hospital nurse to Patrine. "Taxation without Representation is a crying injustice—and the men will wake up to it one of these days. . . . And Mrs. Clash may be a noisy person—and Fanny Leaven may drop her haiches—I do myself when I get stirred up. But they're in earnest—and they've suffered—cruel!—for their convictions. Look at this Petrell—that one that always takes the Chair. She's a physical wreck—with the treatment she's had—and I know what I'm talking about! Haven't we had Suffragettes brought to the Hospital for treatment over and over—after they'd been pitched out of Political Meetings by Stewards and half-throttled by Police. What I say is—Moses! how late! . . . We shall get locked out of the Home if we don't run for it!"

And their light hurrying footsteps and the unmistakable frou-frou of starched print accompanying, passed away up Harley Street. They must have come from the Mass Meeting of Suffragists that had taken place at the Royal Hall.

It had been a memorable evening. The atmosphere of the Royal Hall, thronged not only with the members of the W.S.S.S. but with representatives of many other Women's Unions and Associations and Societies and Leagues, was highly charged with electricity. Mrs. Petrell, resolute-lipped, quiet-eyed, clear of diction and composed of manner, knew, as she sat in her chair beside the little table in the middle of the crowded platform, and better even than the plain-clothes police among the audience—that at any moment the storm might break.

She had advocated with all her much-tried strength an armistice for the War-period, involving a temporary abandonment of militant methods and inflammatory addresses, in favour of a policy of active help and practical sympathy, alike honourable to her head and heart.

Other Societies, Unions, Leagues, and Associations might have followed the lead of their Presidents. But would the W.S.S.S. accept her programme? Militancy had been its motto and the breath of its nostrils through all these troubled years. Since the outbreak of War, Flaming Fanny had busily sown the whirlwind, advocating fresh Demonstrations in conjunction with a system of Unlimited Strikes. Woman must hold her hand, now that her help was needed. Man, the Oppressor of all time, must be coerced by Woman's flat refusal to take part in Relief Work, or War Work, or Work of any kind whatever, into yielding the withheld right. And Mrs. Clash sided with Fanny—and others, nearer home.

Little wonder then that Pressmen, sensing the imminence of riot, had turned out in their shabbiest tweeds and left

their watches and tie-pins at home. Little wonder that Medical Students, who had not already joined the Service, with betting-men and patrons of the pugilistic Prize Ring, found themselves baulked of anticipated entertainment, or that loafers and crooks, pickpockets and rowdies, disappointed of a pleasurable evening, expressed themselves in unmeasured terms regarding that Mass Meeting at the Royal Hall.

A melodious speaking-voice can be a magical wand, wielded by the mouth of a plain woman. But when the woman is beautiful and intellectual, when soul breathes through her words, and strength and tenderness, then she becomes a Force to reckon with, a Power to move mountains and bring water of tears from the living rock of the hardest human heart.

The officially-checked lights of the Hall shone down upon a sea of threatening faces. The electric battens over the speaker's head showed her to be a tall, fair, slender woman, dressed in filmy grey, veiling soft clinging silk of the same shade. The simplicity of her dress was unrelieved by ornaments other than a chain of pearls about her long throat. The red-brown hair seemed heavy for the little Greek head, the lovely pale face with the sensitive lips, wore a look of patient sorrow, the eyes she turned upon the audience—a seething mixture of irreconcilable elements—had in them courage, sympathy and understanding, and knowledge too. Before she spoke she had created an impression. Strangers were ingratiated by her beauty and evident refinement. Those who best knew her were among the wildest and most reckless there. They had quieted, when she had risen up in her unnoticed corner of the platform, and moved forwards to the speaker's place opposite the Chair, as though oil had been cast upon the waters of a stormy sea.

"When God Willed this War that we call Armageddon," she had said to them—"for without the permission of

the Most High the earthly Powers that planned and prepared it could not have plucked the fruit of their desire—it came in time to prevent the declaration of a War even more terrible. War, to the Death, between Woman and Man."

In a few trenchant words she painted the dire results of such hostility.

"That unnatural horror has been mercifully averted," she said to them. "The old sore is healed, there is no hatred nor rancour left. We women have learned what a price has to be paid for the Franchise of Manhood. It is the brave blood that is drenching the soil of Belgium and France and Poland—that will flow in rivers as wide as the Thames at Vauxhall Bridge before Peace is proclaimed again. They have answered the Call. They are pouring into the recruiting offices—in thousands of thousands—those who have given up their loved ones, their homes, their hopes of success in Arts or Sciences, professions or businesses or trades. Will women be as unselfish and as generous when their Call comes? For it will come. It is coming while I stand here!"

They were strangely quiet, under the spell of the beautiful voice, and the eyes that were luminous and deep with tenderness:

"There are faithful Christians among you; brave earnest souls who have prayed to GOD for guidance among the difficulties that beset the way for working-women, and weaker souls have been maddened to frenzy and plunged into unbelief by the intolerance and the injustice, the shrieking wrongs and the unpurged evils that Man, who enters upon his heritage the world, by the Gate of Motherhood, has ignorantly accumulated upon the shoulders of the sex he professes to respect."

There was a murmur of approval at this. She lifted a hand, and they were silent.

"I say to those who have despaired, 'Despair no longer!' I say to those who have prayed—'Your prayer is answered!'

Take up the work that has dropped from the hands that are busy with the rifle. Prove your right to the Parliamentary Franchise. Take your place amongst the World's Workers for good and for all. The Vote will be granted: it cannot be denied! But if you had it now, passionately as you desire it, and the choice were offered you—Oh! my sisters!—would you not yield it up with gladness to bring those dead men back to life again?"

And after a pause of unbroken silence she added:

"For they have fought even better than they knew. They have re-conquered Woman. Freely and willingly as comrade and helper she takes her place and her share of the burden. Peace is proclaimed. The War between the sexes is at an end!"

We know how truly the speaker prophesied. Quietly as the vast Atlantic flows into and fills a labyrinth of empty, echoing, rock-caverns, the vast body of unemployed women took the places of the male workers called away to the Front. They had clicked into the slots before the world was well aware of it, or they themselves understood that a miracle had been wrought.

Said the breeched and gaitered lady-conductor of a North-West tram the other day:

"Now the ones that was brought up active has got their chance to do a bit, and the ones that was brought up idle 'ave found out that they like work, will they ever be content to sit and twiddle their thumbs again? I don't think!" She clipped pink tickets with zeal, and when a red-nosed, watery-eyed elderly man who had offered her a pewter shilling cursed her venomously as she thrust the coin back on him: "'Ere you! . . . 'Op it!" she said to the offender, and caught him neatly by the scruff, hauled him down the cork-screw stairway, and deposited him in the Camden Road without turning a hair.

## CHAPTER LXVIII

### THE DEVIL-EGG

Von Herrnung had quitted the earth sober, to discover at the height of a thousand metres that his potations had dulled his brain. As he ceased to climb and brought down the nose of the Taube to the level, he realised that he was dizzy, and that at the pit of his stomach squatted the aviator's deadly foe, the demon of nausea. He pictured it as a yellow, frog-like thing with frothing leathery lips and green eyes that squinted. This image vexed him, and would not be driven away.

He switched on the hawk-hoverer and sensed the drag of the twin horizontal flanged screws against the thrust of the propeller, adding to its drone the vibration of the endless travelling-chains running in their sheath of transparent talc. To make room for its long groove in the floor of the bird-body, the thick glass port beneath the pilot's feet had been removed by the sergeant-mechanic of the Flight Squadron. Now there were two ports, one on either side. Through these the German looked down upon the shell-pounded ruins of the village-town, its roofless homes and broken enclosures giving the effect of a wild-bees' nest laid open by the gardener's shovel after the gardener has smoked out the bees. As von Herrnung located the baker's house by aid of his recently acquired binoculars, another swirl of sickness took him, and he shuddered and spat bile over the side.

Those distant voices of guns had not ceased their sullen calling. In the rose-flushed south towards which the Taube faced as it hovered above the ruins of the village, black columns of vapour swelled and towered, and acrid flashes stabbed through the murkiness. One should be there, his

manlier self said to him. Better to be a brave German bird dodging Death amongst the puffs of shrapnel, dropping devil-eggs on the British batteries, winning back the forfeited Cross and the lost Imperial favour, than to be here, hanging like a carrion-vulture over the maimed body of a dying man.

Perhaps. But one had promised oneself revenge for the scorn that had stung like fire. And one had bragged to the English boy of what one meant to do. He looked back, and called through the speaking-tube that traversed the canvas over-deck between the pilot's seat and the passenger's:

"Unstrap yourself and come to me and take the control-stick. *Schnell*—do you hear? What is that you say? He put the voice-tube to his ear and heard the shrill pipe answer through it. "You think it best to tell me that you take back your parole?" The big teeth grinned under the red moustache. "All right!" said the Enemy. "While we are in the air, you are free to jump out if you like, and run away. When we get to the ground again, that is another matter. Come now, sit in front of me and take over the controls!"

And as the boy obeyed, creeping beneath the intervening deck and under the canvas partition, the Enemy moved back upon the pilot-seat, keeping his feet on the lower controls, and separating his knees so as to leave a ledge for Bawne to occupy. Still laughing, he took spare safety-straps that hung on each side against the bulwarks, and clipped the patent pneumatic studs to the belt that girt the boy.

It did not do to run risks. Some day, it might occur to the Emperor to order von Herrnung to deliver up his captive. And—the little devil was useful—hellishly! He had come into the world, twelve years ago—possessed of the Flying Gift. He had taken to the air as naturally as a young crow or pigeon. A tap on the shoulder, a word shouted in his ear—and he knew what you wanted! He understood now why his overlord required the unrestricted use of his

arms at this moment. The small hands twitched as they gripped the lever, and shudders convulsed the slender frame.

Noting this von Herrnung grinned. His qualms had left him for the present, he was once more master of his stomach and lord of his cool and steady brain. Through the back of his head the boy could see him—leaning his big body sidewise—craning his neck over the edge of the fuselage—his hand hovering over the bomb hanging near in its wire holder, his keen hard eyes calculating distance—his red brows knitted, his full mouth smiling under its thatch of red hair. The devil-egg would burst upon its impact with a roof or with the ground, a thousand metres under the Taube. How many times since the red dawning of the Aggressor's Day had he, von Herrnung, not plucked out the pin and lifted the latch, and sent Death and Destruction speeding earthwards! Why should this particular devil-egg have exploded five seconds after its release?

The detonating mechanism had been wrongly set, or the explosive had suffered some chemical deterioration. With the volcanic upburst of flaming gases and the fierce blizzard of rending steel splinters, the Taube was shot upwards like the cork from a bottle of champagne. The Enemy had cut out the hovering-gear when he had dropped the devil-egg, and the thrust of the tractor had sent the Taube rushing on. Thus, though she had been bumped about on waves of rising gases—though daylight shone through holes in her wings and body,—a wheel had dropped like a stone from her undercarriage—and a piece of her tail had gone fluttering and swerving earthwards, no serious damage had been done to the machine.

Bawne's cheek was bleeding from the scratch of a splinter, but he stuck manfully to the controls. "Steer south," he had been told, "when I switch off the hoverer," and he had waited, his teeth set, his brows knitted, his eyes on the compass, and his heart crying out to God to save his new-found friend.

He knew it was because he had prayed so hard that the bomb had exploded prematurely. Would the Enemy try again with the one that yet remained? But the Enemy made no sign. One dared not look round or speak to him. Was he in a fit, or sick, or merely shamming? One could feel the big body heaving at one's back as it lay huddled against the canvas partition, with rolling head and arms spread wide, and knees that straddled and sagged.

Jerk! The Taube heaved her after-part as a cow gets up, and nose-dived. Von Herrnung's feet had slipped from the controls, and her rudder was flapping free. As Bawne toed the bar and gripped the guide-wheel, and brought the keel to a level, the blood in his veins tingled and he knew a thrill of joy.

One had borne a lot, but—Man alive!—a moment like this was worth it. What Boy Scout could deny the greatness of this boy's reward? To be master of this giant Bird, rushing at the speed of an express-train over woods and fields and villages, diminished to the patches on a crazy-quilt by the height at which one sped. To hear the shrill breeze harping in the wires and the roar of the flashing tractor, and change the din at a finger-touch to the silence of a glide.

West, where the sun was setting in red fire were signs by now familiar. Linked specks that were big grey German troop-trains ran over the shining gossamer-lines of the railways, going south. Where the shining lines looked like scattered pins, the railways had been blown up by the Belgians, or the British. Things like caterpillars crawling over the white ribbons of the highways were German motor-lorries dragging great howitzers, or Army Supply and Transport, or marching columns of robust, bullet-headed German infantrymen.

A blot of grey upon a town was where a Division rested. Strings of grey spiders hurrying south, would be brigades of cyclist telegraphists or sharpshooters, and processions of drab beetles scuttling along, Field Ambulances, or Staff

motor-cars. One would have said that a green-grey blight had fallen upon Belgium, swiftly advancing, stayed by nothing, devouring as it moved.

East, where the shadow of the Taube raced beside her like a carriage-dog, black streaks that were barges still crawled on the canals, and peasants' carts crept over the roads—and there were no columns of troops in view, nor uglier tokens of the War. Though the red and brown towns showed scant signs of life, late root-crops were being harvested; plough-teams were breaking up the stubbles, factory chimneys were smoking, and acres of linen-web yet spread to bleach along the river-banks.

Later in the month the grey-green blight was to sweep over all this region as the Boche retreated before the thrust of the 1st and 4th British Army Corps, from Houthulst Forest to Menin-on-Lys.

Those voices of the guns were nearer now. They talked on incessantly. You felt the air that carried you vibrating as you flew. The solid earth heaved up in waves under the dusty golden smoke-drifts veiling the south horizon. Black pillars of smoke and *débris* climbed and collapsed against the dusty gold. Grey Imperial Staff cars were parked in the courtyard of a château with pepper-box towers. Officers sat at tables on the vine-covered terrace, while a farm close by was doing duty as a casualty-clearing station. You could pick out the flutter of the Red Cross Flag on a broken tree beside the gateway—and the come and go of the bearers carrying laden or empty stretchers—and the white armlets of the *Sanitätskorps* men who drove the ambulance-cars. To have seen over and over again what grown folks learned from newspapers was to be a man seasoned in War, whilst yet one's bones were young. Well worth the hardships one had borne, this sheaf of ripe experience. Good to know one had obeyed the Chief who said, "*Quit yourself like a man!*"

So Bawne flew on. The fiery chrism of a strange second baptism was on his forehead. Gates of wonder seemed opening on the horizon towards which he hastened, guided by the big broad arrow of the reinforced compass and the thudding of those nearing guns.

Some perception of great issues at stake and marvellous impending changes, ushering in the revival of the forgotten days of Chivalry, may have come at this hour to the child so strangely caught and whirled into the dizzy circles of the maëlstrom of International War. Did a voice whisper to him that as of old by his Pagan forefathers, babes were sacrificed to Bel and Odin—so for the cleansing of the sick world of to-day from the War-madness begotten by greed and materialism a torrent of rich, warm, generous blood was to be shed from the veins of the young? Could he dream that the lower mankind sank, the higher men were to rise—mounting on stepping-stones of obedience and courage, to those heights where the human may walk with the Divine? That through long years to come, bright boys in myriads would drain the wine of Death from the chalice of Self-Sacrifice, and pass to God who kindled in those clean young souls the fire that made Him burn to die for men.

The Enemy was rousing from his doze or dwam, or swoon, or whatever had been the matter with him. The big body was heaving into an upright posture, the big foot was knocking in Morse on the bottom of the fuselage. The boy looked down and saw blood running there—or was it the red of the sunset?

"Shut—off—and—look—at me," rapped the foot, and its thrall obeyed and shrieked at the sight of the horror he was strapped to, glaring with wild eyes, and spitting unintelligible sentences with bloody splinters of shattered teeth and red rags of palate and tongue.

"I am damaged, is it not so? Something hit me when the bomb exploded." Something like this came in strange

sounds from that inhuman face. And the boy shrieked again and again, straining at the belt that bound him to his terrible companion, conscious of nothing but overmastering fear—

"*Quit yourself like a man!*"

He heard the words through the drumming in his ears and his heart left off leaping. His brain cleared. He realised that the Taube was diving to the ground. He switched on power and brought down her tail and pulled up her nose gamely. They passed through a suffocating mist of burned chemicals that deposited red powder on your hands and face, and the glass of your flying-goggles, and parched your lungs like burning Cayenne pepper—and were over the battle-zone.

As far as the eye could take it in the face of earth was moving. Death, like a many-handed mole, seemed working underground. Huge geysers of dirt and mud and stones heaved up in thick black smoke and vapour. The air shook incessantly with reduplicated concussions. Buildings tottered and sank away, and railway bridges melted, and spurts of blinding fire leaped from invisible mouths of guns.

The revolutions were slowing down. The Taube travelled painfully. Beneath her bobbed a row of sausage-shaped observation-balloons straining at their spidery cables, beyond these were the third and second German lines—whitish furrows stretching East and West, with little zigzags, that were communicating-trenches, between. A thin blue haze of rifle and machine-gun fire hung over the pitted ground. The Advanced lines behind their smear of rust-red barbed wire might have been sixty yards from the parapet of the British trenches. Friend and foe were dying there—and over the hurly-burly, dodging Death in puffs of woolly vapour, belched from vertical mobile muzzles, directing fire, signalling, wirelessing, scouting, fighting others who assailed signallers or scouters—wheeled and circled the

Birds of War. Their sharp eyes picked him out flying far down beneath them.

"There goes a Hun somebody's shrapbozzled!" said the pilot of a R.A.F.B.E., shutting off to speak to his observer.

"Going to crash in a minute," said the observer of the Bleriot Experimental. "Where, do you suppose?"

"If he keeps on at that angle," said the pilot from behind his glasses, "he'll pass over that nest of Hun machine-guns in the big shell-pit behind the German Advanced Line, at about a hundred and fifty—and pile in that ploughfield behind our Gunners."

The Taube was flying low and crookedly—the high crescendo whine of shell passed over it—heavy metal sent from German batteries—and other shells from British guns were crashing and bursting near. The wind was getting up in the west, and the drift of the machine was trending eastwards, in spite of anything Bawne could do. Could one keep flying long enough to pass the first line of British trenches? And how would one come to the ground, knowing nothing about landing—and with a bomb on board!

One must get rid of the devil-egg. Should one drop it on the enemy's trenches? As he flew towards them a rag of white fluttered, and Bawne caught his breath. A long line of grey-green men were jumping like grasshoppers over the parapet. They went forwards with their hands up, waving a White Flag, and from the British trenches came men in khaki doubling out to take their prisoners. . . .

*Rat-tat-tatt!*

The khaki figures began to fall. The grey men were cheering. . . . The *rat-tatt*—came from the German machine-guns, pumping out jets of murderous lead. Then in a flash Bawne understood, leaned to the right, and seeing the machine-gun pit beneath him—pulled out the pin, jerked up the latch, and dropped the devil-egg. Horrible to think, it would kill Germans!—but then—to save one's own dear Englishmen——

"Good Night! Did you see that?" asked the pilot of the R.A.F.B.E., shutting off to address his observer, and immediately switching on again, for a geyser of earth and stones and fire, and bits of things that had been men and guns had spurted up from the spot where a moment since had been the gun-pit, and troubled waves of heated air reached them at 5000.

"He knows he's got to come down crash, and jettisoned the lollipop to improve his chances! . . . Civil of him to drop it just when the Deershires were getting it hot and hot! . . . Deserves thanks from the British C. in C., though his Kaiser won't be particularly pleased with him," reflected the R.F.C. observer, as the Taube, flying like a bird with a wounded wing, crossed the lines of the British trenches, dived staggeringly, and crashed down in the ploughed field behind the slogging guns.

## CHAPTER LXIX

### A MENACE; AND GOOD NEWS

*Drip, drip! . . .*

The slow dropping of water on the carpet and the sweet, heavy fragrance of roses, brings me back as it brought Patrine. She got up and pulled down the dark blue blinds with the precaution that was becoming habitude with us at this date, in view of that often bragged-of menace from the sky. She switched up the lights and moved to the table, roughly pulled off the string that tied, and lifted the lid of the cardboard box.

A rich, sweet fragrance that was almost musky enveloped her as she lifted the thin paper. A sheaf of roses of flaming sanguine crimson, tied with black-and-white striped ribbon lay beneath. Black and white are the Prussian colours. Black, white, and red the standard of the Hohenzollern. Patrine knew that von Herrnung had sent the roses, even before she recognised his writing on a thick white envelope pinned to the ribbon binding the flowers.

"*If Isis desires news of 'her dearest', she will open and read the letter. From one who does not desire to forget.*"

The letter contained a lock of hair, jaggedly cut—she knew from whose sweet head. Half blind with tears, she lifted the lock to her lips and kissed it passionately, before she bent herself to read the careful English sentences that revealed the man in all his vanity and lustfulness, insolence, and tyranny, as though the burin of Strang or the brush of Sargent had etched him upon copper or limned him upon canvas, to show the world what depths of infamy can be plumbed by the Superman.

*"Strong Woman of the race of moral weaklings, have you not yet learned to be proud that a Prussian soldier prized your beauty, and took it for his own? When the fierce men in the proud German Field-grey have swarmed over the soil of England, —when, amidst the squadron of night-birds whose feathers gleam mysteriously in the pale moonlight, thy lover flies onward, singing his war-song, laden with his cargo of explosives—when the Red Cock crows on the roof-trees of London's wilderness of houses and London's fire-bells, amidst terrific explosions, ring out the last battle of the century, will Isis then think of me? Revolvers, carbines, bombs, and poisoned arrows are among the gifts I shall bring thee in the hand that wears the mascot pearl of black and white. Coloured signalling-balls set in the silver of the searchlight, shall be thy tiara; for thy arms and thy white bosom there will be strings of rubies outpoured from the broken coffers of the House of Life. Our second nuptials will be celebrated by a mitred Death, amidst the smoking ruins of Westminster Abbey, to the roaring strains of the German Anthem, 'Now Praise Ye the Lord.' Till then au revoir! shall one perhaps say?*

*"Ah, were Isis of the burning beech-leaf tresses not only beautiful but wise, she would place her hand in the hand that stretches yearningly over the North Sea. I wish love more than vengeance; is not that unnatural for a Hun? A golden consciousness of happiness yet to come wells up within me. Would Isis taste that happiness, let her go to her window and open it on the night of the day that brings this letter. There are no Germans in England who are not in prison or under espionage. No, possibly! yet go to thy window! A word to him who waits there, and Isis is once more mine. But beware of turning my tenderness by scornful rejection to hatred. Cold devil!—I should then strike, and frightfully, at the head whence came this hair. Look at it well and answer. T. v. H."*

She could turn no paler, her hue was that of death already. She dropped the loathsome letter from her hand upon the

roses and thrust the lock of hair into her bosom, and went to a window and touched the spring of the blind. It flew up and revealed her tall shape standing there silhouetted against the electric radiance in defiance of that boasted menace from the sky.

The street seemed empty, within the radius of her vision, save for the dark bulk of a motor-car, standing before a house on the same side some way down. Its headlights flashed, once, twice, and again, as though in answer. It slid forwards with a low hissing sound: "*Ss'sh!*" it said, as if in gluttonous anticipation, and stopped opposite the hall-door. Again the headlights flashed, there was a gleam of yellow enamel. She recognised the Darracq car in which von Herrnung had driven her to Fanshaw's Flying Ground on that unforgettable eighteenth of July.

Holding her breath, narrowing her long-sighted eyes for better focus, she scrutinised the driver, recognising in the thick-set figure hunched over the steering-wheel, wearing a peaked cap pulled low over his forehead, and a wide white muffler twisted round his throat, the German who had brought the message from the Three in the blue F.I.A.T. car. She was sure of him when he touched his cap, looking furtively up at the window, and switched on a small electric bulb, illuminating the clock upon the dashboard as though to afford her a view of his face. Its bloodshot pale eyes, thick broad nose, and the unwholesome, purplish colour of the complexion, barred with a big light yellowish moustache with waxed ends, had stuck in her memory as ugly personal traits will stick. Of the slenderer man beside him she had no recollection. He was buttoned up in an overcoat with a fur collar, and wore a soft felt hat. She felt the eyes it shadowed were fastened on her, and recoiled as though from the touch of something unclean and horrible, roughly dragging down the blind.

She was brave, but the sense of being almost alone in the house with those alert, observant eyes outside, spying upon

her movements, made her heart beat suffocatingly, and brought chill damps of deadly terror to the surface of her skin. She moved to a chair with a clogging sense of ultimate effort—the nightmare feeling of striving against a powerful hypnotic influence, bidding her creep downstairs and open the street-door, step into the car waiting at the kerbstone, and be borne away by rushing wheels and whirling screws, or even swifter wings, perhaps, to that War-torn land where von Herrnung was waiting to exact his price for sparing the beloved head.

She drew the lock of hair from her bosom and whispered inarticulate tendernesses to it, stroking its red-gold beauty with fingers and lips. Not until now those thread white strands amongst the reddish-gold conveyed their sinister meaning. When it came it was like a blow delivered full between the eyes. She swayed forwards and fell upon her knees beside the table, her forehead resting on the clenched hand that held the boy's hair. All that was maternal in her fierce, undisciplined nature urged her now to make the sacrifice. Remorse for having forgotten the child in her absorbing love for Sherbrand, was a scourge of fiery scorpions that urged her to the leap.

Its uselessness, the certainty that von Herrnung would keep no hinted promise to restore the hostage, would have been no argument to deter her. Sherbrand's influence might have counterpoised, but she had sent away Sherbrand for his own sake. Now she would go to Bawne, buy him back with body and soul, if need be, from the hands of the torturer, or at least share his agony and die by his side.

Madness was near enough that night to sweep her tattered robe before the eyes of Patrine, and beckon enticingly with her sceptre of plaited straw. She was alone and she had borne so much, and nothing else could save Lynette's boy—unless it were a miracle! Where was God—where was God now? Upon that July night of the child's spiriting away Sherbrand had bidden her pray that Bawne might be

restored to them. She had petitioned in a perfunctory way when she had thanked God for taking away von Herrnung—that the child might be traced and brought back. Now she clenched her hands until the nails dug into their palms, and groaned out, as the dry sobs racked her body, words that sensed after this fashion:

"Save him, save him! For Christ's love save him—and give him back! For the dear sakes of those to whom I have been so ungrateful! hear me—only hear me! and I will—be different. I will serve Thee, O God, who have ignored Thee! I will confess Thee, I who have denied! . . ."

Mean, base, said her pride, to kneel and entreat Him whom you have neglected and insulted. Even though He heard, do you think that He would answer now? But with desperate effort she thrust away the thought from her. The Hound of Heaven had leaped upon her, flying. She felt his teeth in her garments, holding her back from the invisible hands that dragged at her. She knew that unseen forces of Good and Evil were engaged in furious battle for her soul. . . . And strangling, she gasped out incoherent sentences, wild appeals to the Divine Pity. . . . In the midst of these, startling her like a thunderclap, came a hurried knocking at the door.

"Miss Pat!"

It was the voice of Mrs. Keyse, and as Patrine stumbled to her feet and stood wild-eyed and shaking, the little, matronly figure in the black silk gown of housekeeperly dignity appeared upon the threshold of the room.

"You—wanted me, Mrs. Keyse? Is it about the—the yellow car? Have they——"

The hoarse voice and the white, wrung face conveyed to an ardent lover of Patrine that something was wrong with her Doctor's niece. Tragedy was in the air—but Discretion is the better Part of Value, and nobody knew better than Emrigation Jane what fierce passions could boil in the Saxham blood.

"No, Miss Pat. It's not the car, yet, though I fancied I 'eard one stop here a minute back. It's the telephone in the consultin' room ringin', and ringin',—and Chewse gone to bed," Chewse being the trained maid who admitted patients and received messages. "And me with the best will in the world never could make 'ead or tail of them tellermessages—except the 'ulloing! And pre'aps you'd come and write down for the Doctor whatever it is they've got to say. . . ."

"Very well. Don't wait, I'm coming directly!"

Mrs. Keyse vanished, and with that dreamlike sense of unreality upon her, Patrine followed downstairs and passed along the silent corridor. The electric lamp above the Doctor's table had been switched on. She took the Doctor's chair and rang-up and waited, sitting where Saxham had sat when Lynette's sweet lips first touched his forehead —where the big man had planned self-murder in the darkest hour of his despair. The frayed patch on the Persian rug beneath her feet had been worn by Saxham's usage. The triptych frame that held the portraits of Lynette and Bawne drew Patrine's eyes as she sat waiting, and the clench of her big white hand upon the table-ledge, the bend of her black brows and the stern sorrow stamped upon her face made her likeness to the Doctor more than ever apparent now.

"Halloa!" she called, and the brusque harshness of her own voice was startlingly like Saxham's. A sense of Destiny oppressed her. She felt as one stifling in a vacuum —drowning for lack of air. Her prayers had rolled back upon her soul unanswered. The sense of spiritual desolation intensified her desperate loneliness. No good to pray and cling until you broke your nails to that great Rock that upholds the Crucifix. Better let go, and be carried away by the torrent. Signs and wonders are not wrought in these days!—said that other Patrine within Patrine—and if any were, there would be no miracle. You fool, you fool, to dream of one!

She was sorry for herself as she sat there waiting. This little duty done, she would rise and obey that sinister summons from the outer darkness. Nothing on earth nor in Heaven could help or prevent. The sudden tinkle of the bell came at this juncture. The call was in Sir Roland's well-known voice.

"Halloa! . . . Is that you, Saxham?"

"Halloa!" she called back in that voice so strangely like *his* and unlike her own.

"Good! Well, my true friend and faithful coadjutor of old time," said the crisp voice, shaken a little as though by some irrepressible emotion or excitement, "some news has been communicated to us by Wireless that will lift up your heart and your wife's. Are you listening? . . . To-day, about six P.M., near Langebeke, north-west of Ypres, at the moment of the White Flag ruse that cost the Deershire Regiment two hundred men, a two-seater Taube, flying low, as though something were the matter with her engine, came wobbling over the British lines. Nobody shot at her—she had just given our side sufficient reason for consideration by dropping a highly-effective bomb on a wasp's nest of German machine-gunners—and she crashed to ground behind a battery of First Corps R.F.A. Her German pilot had been frightfully wounded. His passenger, who sat in his lap to steer—and dropped the bomb!—escaped with a shake-up. You've got the story? Then, here's the tag of it. WE'VE GOT YOUR BOY! Bawne was the lucky fellow who only got a shaking. He arrives at Charing Cross to-night at twelve sharp!"

He added, as a stifled cry travelled over the wire:

"Congratulations with all my heart, to you and Mrs. Saxham. And to Miss Pat, though I'm afraid she pays, poor girl, in sorrow for your joy. There is a report that Sherbrand's Bird of War No. 2 has been shot down by a Zeppelin he encountered returning to the Front from England to-day, to supply the place of an R.F.C. pilot—killed

while on observation-service near St. Yves—for Callenby's Cavalry Corps."

There was a stifled sound of interrogation or an exclamation. The Chief continued:

"He had no bombs. It was madness to attack with only a Maxim and their magazine-revolvers, but glorious madness worth a thousand sane, reasonable acts. As it is, the Zeppelin—supposed to have been on her way from Ostend to bomb St. O—was badly crippled and compelled to turn back. It was a shell from one of her Q.F.'s that exploded Sherbrand's petrol-tank and set the Bird on fire. The machine was seen to fall in flames near Dixschoote—held by the Germans. Sherbrand and his observer must be prisoners—that is, supposing they're alive. Hard luck! Break it gently to the poor girl! Good-night!"

There was no answering Good-night, only a faint thud and rustle. Sir Roland did not guess what he had done as he rang off and hung the receiver up. And Lynette, coming into the consulting-room, noiselessly as a pale moonbeam, found a big galumphing girl she loved lying huddled between the chair and table, with her white face pressed against the spot worn threadbare by the Doctor's feet.

Coincidence, you say, perhaps. Well, but what is Coincidence? Is it a Dust-wind careering over the Desert in the neighbourhood of the Pyramids, playing with straw and twigs and dead locusts' wings, and one stray fragment of printed paper, as a Mounted Division of the British Expeditionary Force encamped upon the slope not far from Gizeh, ride out with the dawn to exercise their horses on the plain that is partly flooded by the Nile? Or is it the ragged quarter-sheet torn from an English newspaper, that wraps itself about the spurred ankle of the big blond young Englishman who rides the vicious chestnut mare?

Long lines of horses marching in threes for miles, black

and coffee-coloured natives in flowing jubbehs mixed up with tanned young British Centaurs in sun-helmets and khaki shorts—and the rag of paper clings to the leg of the one man there whom its news concerns. She who is dearer than all save Honour is once more a free woman,—and his faith and constancy are to meet their reward. His letter lies before me; a sentence pencilled more blackly than the rest stands out upon the yellowish paper:

*"If this be accident it is incredible. If Design, it is miraculous. And I had rather thank Heaven for a miracle vouchsafed than owe even such happiness—to Chance."*

When the deep swoon gave place to semi-consciousness, the pale lips uttered nothing but broken words. Locked away safely behind them was the glorious news that would have changed two people's lives. Thus Lynette was still ignorant of her own great happiness, when having helped Patrine upstairs to her room and put her tenderly to bed, she dismissed Mrs. Keyse to her own slumbers, and took her place beside Patrine's pillow, listening to the sighing breaths that were growing deeper and fuller, keenly alert for the sound of the Doctor's latch-key and the Doctor's step in the hall.

It was close upon the smallest hour. Something had detained Saxham. Sitting in the darkened room beside the long prone shape beneath the coverings, Lynette was free to lean her head against the back of the chair she sat in and yield herself to the bitter sweetness of memories of her lost boy.

What the sorrow of Shakespeare wrought in deathless lines no halting pen like mine dare strive to portray. Enough that the beloved little ghost that haunted the woman whose heart was breaking, was closer than ever to Lynette on this night. All day the sweet obsession had thrust itself between Bawne's mother and solid, tangible

things. The red-gold sheen of the boyish head, the gay blue challenge of the laughing eyes, the coaxing tones of the treble voice had tortured the senses they deceived. She had thrust him away with both hands, for ordinary, commonplace duties claimed, and yielding led the way to madness. He had come back again and again, to be driven away once more. Now that her hands lay idle in her lap—now that she was withdrawn from the world and its realities, the beloved little ghost returned and had his will with her.

Sitting in the haunted gloom, a strange conviction came to Lynette. This was not Grief, travestying in the figure of the absent, but a visitation from the World Unseen. . . . Bawne was dead, and had been dragged back from the threshold of the Beyond by her own unbridled yearnings. Could there be a punishment more terrible than this? Only those who have loved and lost, and clinging to their faith in a Future Life, strive to bear patiently the burden of bereavement, can comprehend the torture of this woman in this hour.

The Presence grew more torturingly tangible. The empty shell of the house that had been Bawne's home was full of his callings, his movements, his play, his laughter. She heard his quick soft breathing behind her chair in the darkness. Once she could have vowed that a hard little boyish hand brushed against her cheek. Then she was alone once more, except for the unconscious sleeper. And then the torture began all over again.

Bawne was coming home, late, from the Hendon Flying Ground. The long months of misery—the horror of the War—had been a dreadful dream. She heard the long *br'r'* of the electric hall-bell under the impetuous insistent finger—the small scurry of his entrance, a squawk from the maid who answered night-calls—a whispered word or two, and the clumping of the heavy little brogues upon the stairs. Would he trip at the corner where he always stubbed

his toe? she wondered—and she plainly heard him stumble. Then her hair stiffened upon her head, and a long shudder rippled through her. The little clumping brogues had stopped before Patrine's bedroom door.

"*Mother!*"

His voice called, and his well-known thump came on the door-panel. The handle clicked. She controlled her shuddering and forced her stiffened tongue to speech.

"*Come in, my own!*"

The tall door swung slowly inwards. A wedge of brightness from the lighted landing threw his shadow over the white-enamelled door-post. . . . The darkness of the room soaked it greedily up. Then the doorway was a square of radiance with a little ghostly figure framed in it. All the light was behind him. She could not see his face, but she felt his eyes upon her. . . . Then the voice that her ears were sick for said with a quaver in its treble:

"It's dark, but I can hear you breathing! . . . Mother, why didn't you and Father come? I thought when I got there I'd be sure to see you! . . . But amongst all those faces and faces not one was yours—and—Man alive!—I wanted to blub a bit! I'm not quite sure that I didn't, you know!"

She stetched her arms to the beloved little ghost, whispering:

"My poor, poor love, my baby, my treasure! Mother knows how much it hurt. But be patient a little longer. Soon—soon—your father and I——"

The woe-wave rose and swelled in her bosom, tears began to run over her stiff white face. The clasped hands she stretched to him were quivering, but she controlled them like the trembling of her voice.

"Go back to Paradise, my little son! Wait patiently, my love, my Angel! I have been wrong, but I will grieve no more! I will be patient—O! believe——"

A man's footsteps sounded on the staircase and the great shadowy figure of the Doctor appeared behind Bawne's

little shape. With a swift movement Saxham caught up the bewildered boy, made one long stride across the threshold, and put the warm, living treasure into the mother's outstretched arms. . .

Once again big black-lettered contents-bills shrieked from the railings and were worn after the fashion of heralds' tabards by the vendors of newspapers, and the editions were snapped up as fast as they came out. Here are some of the headlines:

"THRILLING ESCAPE OF KIDNAPPED BOY SCOUT FROM THE HANDS OF THE HUN. YOUNG HERO OF NORTH SEA ADVENTURE LANDS BEHIND BRITISH LINES AT LANGEBEKE IN TAUBE WITH A BOCHE PRISONER. FULL STORY OF HOW SCOUT WHO SAVED THE CLANRONALD PAPERS BOMBED THE GERMAN MACHINE-GUNS. DECORATION OF SCOUT SAXHAM WITH 'GOLDEN WOLF' BADGE BY ROYAL PRESIDENT AT ASSOCIATION HEADQUARTERS. PROBABLE TESTIMONIAL FROM BRITISH PUBLIC. AFTERNOON TEA WITH THE WAR MINISTER AT WHITEHALL. EXPECTED INVESTITURE WITH EDWARDIAN ORDER OF MERIT. WHAT YOU GET BY BEING PREPARED!"

And again:

"SPLENDID PLUCK OF BRITISH AVIATOR. FIGHTS ZEPPELIN ON WAY TO BOMB BRITISH HEADQUARTERS. AIRSHIP CRIPPLED. SHERBRAND R.F.C. KILLED. FALLS IN FLAMES OVER GERMAN LINES. HEROIC END OF SOLE REMAINING HEIR TO PENINSULAR WAR EARLDOM, AND INVENTOR OF THE HAWK-HOVERER THAT SOLVES PROBLEM OF STABILITY. WILL WAR OFFICE ADOPT GREAT INVENTION, EMPLOYED BY ALLIES' FLYING SERVICES?"

Three days later:

"SHERBRAND R.F.C. RECEIVES POSTHUMOUS HONOURS FROM FRANCE AND BELGIUM. CROIX D'HONNEUR AND ORDER OF LEOPOLD. WHY NOT BRITISH D.S.O.?"

## CHAPTER LXX

### A LOVER'S JOURNEY

THE crossing—in this Arctic April weather when all of Britain and Belgium and North-West France lay under snowdrifts—had been calm and smooth enough for the worst sea-stomachs on the steamer. The tall young woman in the Navy blue felt hat with the well-known V.A.D. ribbon, and the long blue serge coat with the Red Cross shield-badge on the left breast, seemed used to travelling alone in War-time. She had secured a dry chair, set in the shelter of the after-deck-saloon, and a lifebelt as stipulated by the authorities, and tucked herself in her travelling-rug with her suit-case under her feet before the lights went out. Thus she had remained throughout the passage, with her dark eyes looking seawards, as deaf to occasional bursts of uproarious song from a draft of returning Blighties packed on the lower-deck, as to the siren's raucous shrieks.

Courteous fellow-passengers, chiefly British and Belgian officers returning from leave, would have been ready enough to have chatted with the young woman who was going to the Front. Such attentions as they offered her she accepted frankly. One got her tea and sandwiches, another offered chocolate, another a foot-warmer. Yet another insisted on lending her an unnecessary extra rug. They pointed out the hovering Fleet hydroplanes, and the diligently-scouting searchlights of the destroyers guarding the sea-way, and the Hull-bound Dutch liner whose neutrality was proclaimed in illuminated side-letters, blazing like a sea-Alhambra upon the east horizon, and the Hospital ship that passed close, coming from Boulogne laden with wounded, the huge Red Cross upon her flank picked out with blazing green lights.

One and all united in assuring the wearer of the V.A.D. uniform that there was no danger. Though when the red and green eyes on the ends of the East and West jetties winked into sight over the coal-black shining water, her fellow-passengers congratulated Patrine as heartily as though some peril had been escaped.

"Nothing more doing, Pinkums, old thing!" said an experienced youngster of twenty to a susceptible senior whom Patrine's unprotected condition had roused to a strong sense of responsibility. "She's got enough passes from British and French Headquarters to make a poker-hand. I saw her showin' 'em to the authorities at Folkestone. Besides, have heart, there's a Red Tab here to meet her. We'd better hence it before we're snubbed."

And they saluted, and clattered down the crowded gangway, grabbing their valises and buttoning up their British warms, and hurried away to get into trench-kit, webbings, and waders, and swell the crowd in the railway-station—waiting to go up to the Front and carry on with the hourly, momentary game of touch-and-go with Death.

While Patrine looked eagerly about her, listening to the hum of the vast human beehive. This was not the big rambling, old-fashioned French seaport one had known so well before the War. Under sky-blind arc-lights and red, green, and white lamps, every form of activity imaginable in connection with the running of that now huge and complicated machine, the British Field Army, seemed even at this hour to be in full swing. The rumble of steam-cranes and the roar of dynamos, the panting of pneumatic hold-dischargers, the clank of couplings, and the shrieks of locomotives mingled with the tinny voices of gramophones from the recreation-rooms at the great packed barracks and crowded camps, and the sounds of song and laughter and applause from music-halls and picture-palaces.

"Yes, it goes on most of the time," said the Red Tab who had come to meet Patrine, an officer upon the Staff of the

Commandant of a Headquarters not far from—a certain place where Miss Saxham wished to go. "The Army's got to be rationed and equipped and horsed and foraged, and timbered and coaled and petroled and munitioned, as well as cobbled and engineered and patched and tinkered and nursed—don't you follow me? And these Base Ports are jolly useful. Nobody goes to bed much, I fancy. Perhaps they'll make up the sleep they've lost by-and-by, after the War."

"What-ho, Nubbins! Back from the Old Shop? Sorry! —didn't happen to see you weren't alone!"

The station had vomited a flood of khaki, tumbling down the half-lit quays to take later boats by storm. A tall, lanky officer of Gunners had hailed Red Tab effusively; then, seeing him to be engaged with a lady, hurried on with apologies and a salute for Patrine.

"Don't mind me! Do call back your friend," she urged. "He seemed so glad to see you."

"Thanks much. If you don't mind. Whewip! Whewip!"

And the other, recalled by a shrill whistle, wheeled and came back upon his stride, to grasp the offered hand. Whereupon, ensued the following strictly private duologue:

"How goes the Battery?"

"First class. And your crowd?"

"Crawling along as per, usual. Congrats on the Oudstyde affair!"

"Thanks frightfully! But the whole thing was a bit of a fluke—everyone knows that. *They* had thrown down a gas-attack and the wind went about-face. So we stayed where we were and shelled them through their chlorine. Then they got their Reserves up and came on in lumps—the old Zulu formation—and Pyers and his Engineers got to work with the"—the speaker's voice dropped to an undertone—"what Pyers calls the 'Piffbozzler.'"

"The rose by any other name——" quoted Red Tab, and

went on: "I'd have given a tenner to have been there!—and as for old Clanronald—I wonder if he got leave from—wherever he is—to see the stunt that day?"

Said the Gunner:

"If he did—and had such a thing as a stomach about him, he must have simply—vomited! Pyers says he felt like the Angel with the Flaming Sword—when he didn't feel like an Indian jeweller with a blowpipe—frizzling a column of white ants marching over the floor. You've seen how the things come on and on——"

"Yahgh!" remarked Red Tab expressively.

"But—just for once—we didn't happen to be on the frizzled side The C. in C. has laughed to the verge of hysterics over a leader in the Berlin *Lokal Anzeiger*, with reference to the realised dream of the 'homicidal maniac' Clanronald. 'A deplorable example of the perversion of *Die Wissenschaft* at the murderous hands of English military chemists,' they called it. Pretty neat from Boches who've been pumping burning paraffin into our trenches, and suffocating platoons of men with asphyxiating gases, ever since May."

"And particularly appropriate from people who bribed a crack Professor of Literature to engage as librarian at Gwyll Castle—set the Library Wing on fire and steal the portfolio with the plans of the 'homicidal maniac' three weeks before the War—when Prinz Heinrich and old Moltke were stopping in London. They'd promised their agent twelve million marks if he succeeded. Wonder what he got from them when the plot fizzled out? Well, so-long! Any message for Edith?'

"Tell her you saw me topping, and remember me to your wife!"

And they gripped hands and parted, and Red Tab hurried back to the tall young woman waiting on the flagstones under a blue shaded arc-lamp, saying:

"Good of you not to mind. But a shame to keep you

waiting. No—we go out at this gate. I've got a car waiting. More cushy than a crowded railway-carriage—unless you'd have preferred going by train?"

The grey landaulette waiting in the side-street presented no more unusual feature than unusually heavy armoured tyres, and a guard of razor-edged steel bars protecting the front seat.

"In case of barbed wire—strung across country roads," explained Red Tab. "One runs a chance of getting decapitated—travelling fast at night—or in foggy weather—without a jigger of this sort. Let me stick this cushion at your back and tuck the rugs about you. There's a Thermos in the pocket with hot coffee—and sandwiches in a box. Don't restrain your appyloose if you feel at all hungry! The grub was put in specially for you. No: you won't hear the guns yet, except at intervals, and rather faintly. Fact—I've heard 'em in the South of England more distinctly than one does here! But at St. O—, twenty-eight miles from the Front—they're loud enough at times—though there's nothing much doing. Things have been as dull as ditch-water and none of us'll be sorry when the Boches get a move on again. No—thanks, I'm not coming inside! Responsible for your safety. Advise you to tuck up and go to by-by!"

The car settled into its speed when the ups and downs of the old town had been left behind, and the belated activities of the Base Port had died into a distant hum. It slackened pace when the blaze of its headlights showed long black columns of laden motor-lorries upon the wintry roads ahead of it—or horse-drawn transport waggons—or droves of animals, the steam of whose breath and shaggy hides hung over them in a cloud—or bodies of men in heavy marching order—French and British soldiers wearing the new steel headpiece,—shaped after the fashion of Mambrino's helmet, like a basin turned upside down.

And sometimes there were the halts at barriers or patrol-

posts near towns or villages, where the light of swung lanterns reddened the moustached faces of gendarmes of Chasseurs. But usually when Patrine cleared a space upon the misty window-glass, the snow-covered landscape would be flying past under the fitful moonlight, with the elongated shadow of the grey Staff car galloping beside it like a demon dog.

Midnight was striking from an ancient church-tower when, passing the guarded barriers of a town of old-world houses, and stopping in a street running from a Place bathed in frosty moonlight, and dominated by a vast cathedral, Red Tab, with icicles on his clipped moustache and fur collar, got down and tapped upon the rimy glass.

"Sorry to wake you up, Miss Saxham!" he said, opening the door as Patrine sat up, straightened the dented brim of her hat and blinked denial of her slumberousness, "but here's the end of your journey. This is the Ursuline Convent of St. O—, where we've arranged for you to billet to-night. The Superioress is a frightfully hospitable old lady, and my uncle—I mean Sir Roland—thought you'd be more cushy with the Sisters than at a common hotel!"

"Sir Roland is always kind. But you, Captain Smyth-Howell?" She looked out at her red-tabbed escort with compunction as he tugged at the chain of a clanging bell, and beat his mittened hands together, stamping upon the pavement to warm his frozen feet.

"Me? Oh, I'm pushing on to Divisional Headquarters—twenty-five miles from this place and five miles north of the Belgian frontier. You'll be sent on to Pophereele in the morning, first thing. The French Chaplain of the Red Cross Hospital there is staying for the night with the Bishop at the Palace here. A tremendously agreeable old bird the Chaplain—and a Monsignore of the Vatican. I've met him—and he said he'd be delighted to look after you. Don't get down—it's frightfully slippery!"

But the tall, womanly figure was already standing beside him on the snowy cobblestones, tilting a round white chin towards the sky, and narrowing long eyes—"queer eyes" he mentally termed them—to see the better through her veil.

"What glorious stars!"

He liked the soft warmth of her voice, as he answered:

"Magnificent, aren't they? Look at Draco blazing away, high over the north transept of the Cathedral. And that would be Aquila—I rather fancy—lowish on the horizon, over that ruined tower. That's a bit of their famous Abbey——"

"Great Scott!"

"Did anything startle you?" he asked. "You said——"

"I know I said it, but I didn't mean to. There, again—" She pointed as forked tongues of pale rainbow-tinted fire leaped up from the northern horizon, throwing into momentary relief the Cathedral's stately bulk and the huddled housetops.

"Those are Boche fireworks!"

"Fireworks?"

"Star-shell, rockets, and so forth. They regularly treat us to a display before they begin to pound us again. Where are we fighting? Oh, pretty busy north—as far as Ypres and as far south as La Bassée. French on our right—French and Belgians on the left of us. More French holding Verdun. My hat! what gorgeous fighters! Men of steel with muscles of vulcanised rubber. And we thought the Gaul an absinthe-drinking degenerate. I tell you we wanted this War to open our eyes for us. Perhaps they did too! Here's one of the Sisters coming now!"

Hurrying felt slippers with rope soles shuffled over stone pavements. The key grated and the bolts shot back. A little Sister Portress in a close guimpe and flowing black veil, with a blue-checked apron tied over her habit, swung back the heavy door, holding her lantern high.

Just Heaven, upon how cold a night Madame had arrived

from England! Madame must be perished. But there was coffee, and soup *très chaud* not only for Madame but for M. l'Officier. And also the chauffeur. Madame *la Supérieure* would never permit that either should proceed without nourishment. If M. l'Officier and his attendant preferred not to enter, the Sister would wait upon them in the car.

And so Patrine, after taking leave of her red-tabbed escort, was led away to the Mother Superior, a little, bright-eyed, kindly Religious, full of solicitude for Mademoiselle, who, confessing to having emptied a Thermos of hot coffee, and a box of sandwiches during the later stages of the transit, was borne away from the guest's refectory up and down several crooked flights of ancient stairs to a white-washed apartment, containing a *prie-dieu* and a big plaster Crucifix, a great walnut bed with faded *Directoire* curtains, a minute washstand,—a faint smell of scorched wood, emanating from the perforated metal registers of a *calorifère*, and a bad little coloured print of Lord Roberts, within a stitched border of yellow *immortelles* and faded laurel-leaves, that had been green and fresh six months before. . . .

Patrine spent a white night in the town where the old brave heart of the great soldier had given its last throb for England. Not because those thudding guns in the north and east kept her wakeful—or because she had never stayed in a convent before.

She was going to Sherbrand—her Flying Man—who had been supposed to be dead and found to be living,—and who had written to say that he did not want Patrine. The letter lay against her heart, and her hands were folded tightly over it, as she lay staring with shining eyes at the drawn curtains flapping in the chill breeze stinging through the open window that had been fastened with a nail when the English guest arrived.

## CHAPTER LXXI

### LIVING AND DEAD

"PATHETIC ECHO OF AIR-TRAGEDY. SHERBRAND, R.F.C., NOT DEAD OR PRISONER. RESCUED BY AMERICAN RED CROSS AMBULANCE. IN HOSPITAL NEAR YPRES. WILL RECOVER, BUT BLIND FOR LIFE."

The clamorous headlines had followed close on a telephone from Sir Roland. Patrine had learned what it means to cry for joy—an unforgettable experience. She had discovered that one who kneels down to thank God for a boon so marvellous, has no words left to offer Him, nor even tears and sighs.

She had written again and again to Sherbrand, saying only "*Let me come to you!*" Passionate, pitiful, tender letters, answered after weeks of delay by one page in the stiff, neat handwriting of the American Red Cross Nursing Sister who acted as amanuensis for the blind man.

"*April*, 1915.

"You have said that you wish to visit me in my blindness. I thank you for the expressed desire, but I cannot receive you here! I have never been the kind of man who bid for pity from women, and the ties that you broke, voluntarily, six months ago, I do not wish to renew. My mother has been here to bring me some things"—the French and Belgian decorations, guessed Patrine—"and has gone away again. She understands that it is best for me to remain here, because, although the War is over as far as I am actively concerned, I can hear the guns and breathe the breath of battle, and know when the 'planes pass overhead, and follow them in thought. There is little else a

blind man can do, except make toys or baskets! Do not think me bitter or discontented—I am neither—quite O.K. I wish people had been told I brought down the Zepp., that's all! With gratitude for your kind and friendly remembrance,

"Yours most sincerely,
"A. S."

A formal letter, but between the cold, stiff lines Patrine had read reproach, and love, and yearning. An unkind letter—but could she judge him harshly, her poor blind eagle, sitting in darkness never to be lifted, listening to the guns, and the battle-song of the Birds of War, drifting down out of "his sky"?

There was Mass in the Convent chapel at seven next morning. A military chaplain offered the Divine Sacrifice, and the rush-bottomed chairs were occupied by soldiers, French Chasseurs and Zouaves, Senegalese and Negroes, English Guards and Irish Fusiliers, Highlanders and a German or two,—all patients from the Hospital under the management of the Ursuline Sisters—a big building next door to the Convent, that had been a young ladies' boarding school in the days before the War.

The chapel was a dusky place. So dusky that though the red carnations and white Eucharis lilies in the Altar vases struck vivid notes of colour in the light of the Altar candles, the ruby spark of the Sanctuary lamp and the bright flame of the Paschal candle were barely visible in the brooding gloom. You could only tell the place to be crowded, by the deep-toned chorus of masculine voices joining fervently in the *Confiteor* and *Credo*. Pale green flashes momentarily lit up the crimson and purple and tawny tracery of the round east window, and the distant thudding of the guns at the Front made an accompaniment to the sacred rite.

The French priest officiating was a lean, short, elderly personage with brilliant eyes set in a mask of walnut-brown

wrinkles and a resonant voice that was illustrated by beautiful, illuminating gestures as he preached.

"Let none say in your hearing, unrebuked, that this War is an unrelieved misfortune," he said to his hearers. "Recognize with me, my French compatriots, the Divine Mercy as extended particularly to France in this fiery ordeal! Her towns and villages have been destroyed,—her buildings have been shattered, her sons in countless thousands slain, but her national character has been purified—the soul of her people has been raised from the mire. If there is one here present among you—whatever may be his nationality, —who is conscious of loving Virtue better and loathing Vice more intensely, since the beginning of this War—then the War has been a blessing—to him—and not a curse! Acts have been performed—and are repeated hourly—acts of a sublime and touching selflessness and an almost Divine tenderness,—not only by men and women who are mild and gentle, but by the roughest and the most abandoned of either sex. The good seed was sown in time of peace—ah yes, my children! but it might have perished. And now Our Lord, who loves flowers, has caused these pure and exquisite blossoms to spring for Him from the field of War."

After his tiny sermon, delivered in French, and repeated in English, he hesitated a moment before turning to the Altar and said, with emotion in his mobile face and quick utterance:

"I have to ask a favour of you this morning. It is that at the Commemoration of the Departed you will unite with me in a mental act of prayer. Prayer for the soul of one to whom the gift of Faith, not being sought, was not given. A soul that has passed forth in darkness into the presence of Him who is the Light."

He turned away and began the *Credo*. As the deep chorus of male voices followed, Patrine found herself agreeing with the preacher's discourse.

"What was it," she asked herself, "that led me out from

overheated, crowded rooms, oppressive with the scent of flowers and perfumes of triple extract—where the Tango and the Turkey Trot were being danced by half-clad, painted women and effeminate young men—and set my feet upon a mountain-slope with the free winds of heaven blowing upon me? I must answer—It was the War!"

As the great waves of the *Credo* surged and beat against the old brown rafters she went on thinking:

"What has made me quicken to the call of Humanity—awakened me to the knowledge of my sisterhood with my fellow-women? What has taught me how to live without dissipation and do without useless luxuries? Again—the War! And oh! what has taught me the meaning of Love in all its fulness, and set within the shrine of my heart this great sacred sorrow, and kindled in my soul the pure altar-flame of Faith? The War, the terrible War!"

She prayed for Sherbrand at the Commemoration of the Living! A somewhat incoherent petition that her Flying Man might be helped to bear his blindness, and find some happiness in her unchanged love. And the thought of the dead Agnostic haunted her. Who was the man, and what had brought about his ending? Was he a patient in the Ursuline Hospital?"

A French, an English, or a German soldier? By a subtle change in her mental purview, recollections of von Herrnung began to occupy her mind.

"I will not think of him!—I will not!" she said to herself desperately. Then the obsession assumed an acute form. All that she most wished to forget in her relations with the Kaiser's Flying Man was being revived in her memory. Scene by scene, sentence by sentence, she was forced to live over the hated Past again.

She must have risen from her knees and left the chapel, so unbearable became the torment, but that the sacring bell rang its triples, the deep tones of the *Sanctus* answered from the turret, and the Host was lifted up. Then her tense

nerves relaxed. The almost tangible presence of evil withdrew itself. She breathed more freely, and peace flowed in balmy waves upon her stormy soul. In prayer for herself and those who were most dear to her, she lost the sense of the unseen hands plucking at her garments and the soundless voice whispering at her ear. And presently at the *Ipsis Domine*, when supplication is made by priests and people for the departed, she prayed for the soul of the Denier—that the Divine Mercy might reach and enfold him, and lead him yet into the Way of Peace.

"*Christ is risen who created all things, and who hath had pity upon mankind. . . . Purchased people, declare His virtues, alleluia! Who hath called you out of darkness into His admirable light.*"

To Patrine the Call had come.

It was Easter Week and there were many communicants. The nuns and the French and English Red Cross nurses helped the lame to reach the Altar-rails and guided the blind. When a tall, blond young English Officer with bandaged eyes and an empty sleeve was led up to his Master's Table, Patrine was grateful that the chapel was so dusk.

She was to meet the Chaplain of the Pophereele Stationary Hospital after Mass, the Mother Superioress had said, Thus, guided by an Ursuline Sister, she passed from the chapel into a long, whitewashed cloister looking on the garden, its open arches facing the doors of what had been class-rooms, and now were wards. Another Ursuline, the Sister Superintendent of the Hospital, with a young, gentle face framed in her close white guimpe and flowing black veil, sat writing in a big book at a plain deal table. Near her were some shelves with rows of bottles and a chest of drawers with measuring-glasses upon it, and a pestle and mortar and druggists' scales. Above the table a black wooden Crucifix hung against the whitewashed wall.

"This is Sœur Catherine, who keeps the Hospital accounts and dispenses the medicines, and posts the register

in which we set down the names of all the wounded received and discharged. Take care, Mademoiselle! That paint is new and comes off!" cried the chaperoning Sister, snatching aside the skirt of Patrine's long blue V.A.D. coat.

She had brushed, in passing, against a wooden tablet that leaned against the wall near the door through which she had come. A big square of black-painted deal surmounted by a gabled and eaved Cross of German pattern, and bearing an inscription in white Gothic lettering:

"HIER RUHT IM GOTT

EIN DEUTSCHER FLIEGENDE OFFIZIER."

"That is for the grave of the German officer who died yesterday. One of the Bavarian soldiers is painting it. He has not finished—he has only gone away for a moment to get some more *céruse* from Mother Madeleine."

Sister Catherine offered the explanation. She added, as the tall English girl glanced at something that lay on the deal table beside the register:

"That is his flying-cap, poor man! and the belt that shows his *rang militaire*. They will be placed upon the pall when they carry him to the cemetery. But pardon! One should have observed before that Mademoiselle was suffering! What! Mademoiselle is not ill, not even a little fatigued? Then what Mademoiselle needs is a *petit déjeuner*."

And Patrine was whisked away to the guest's refectory to be refreshed with *pistolets* and coffee. Monseigneur would follow a little later. Madame la Supérieure had arranged for Monseigneur to take *déjeuner* with M. l'Aumonier. Later, Monseigneur hoped for the pleasure of meeting the English Mademoiselle.

Mademoiselle's tall rounded figure, ushered by the little active Ursuline Sister, had barely passed through the glazed swing-doors leading from the cloister to the Convent, when

the short, spare, elderly priest who had celebrated Mass entered from the chapel, followed by the Convent Aumonier, who had served him at the altar. Even as the nun rose from her table, the vividly clear eyes of Monseigneur, set in the mask of dry walnut-brown wrinkles, dropped on the painted head-board propped against the wall.

"That is for him?"

The supple right hand of Monseigneur waved towards the chapel, then extended itself to the Sister, who curtsied and kissed his amethyst ring.

"For him, Monseigneur," answered the Aumonier, to whom the question had been addressed.

"*Dieu veuille avoir son âme!*"

The left sleeve of Monseigneur's decidedly rusty serge soutane bore the well-known brassard. Its scarlet and white peeped between the folds of his heavy black mantle as he made the Sign of the Cross.

"His name is missing from the inscription," he commented, producing a battered silver snuff-box and helping himself to a generous pinch. "Why, might one demand?"

"The initials will be painted in presently, Monseigneur. There will be no name—by desire of the deceased!"

"He preferred anonymity?" The amethyst ring of Monseigneur's prelacy flashed violet as he dusted the brown powder from his upper-lip with a blue checked handkerchief. "The Père Aumonier tells me," his startlingly clear eyes were on the Sister, "that terrible as were his injuries, he might have recovered—that his death occurred suddenly and unexpectedly."

"But yes, Monseigneur, he might have recovered!" The fair face framed in the narrow guimpe was shadowed and troubled. "The *coup d'obus* had spared the brain, arteries, and vertebra. His sight was uninjured—M. le Commandant and his colleagues had achieved wonders in the partial restoration of the visage. Speech was difficult —but we could understand him—unless he was sullen and

would only speak German to us. But at those times a Bavarian soldier interpreted—he who has painted the headboard for the grave."

"He—the German officer—was grateful to those who nursed him?" inquired Monseigneur of the Aumonier.

The stout little Chaplain visibly hesitated. It was the Sister who answered in her clear and gentle voice:

"Alas! no, Monseigneur! He was arrogant, even brutal. But then—he suffered so terribly, in mind as in body—one could not be angry at anything he said. He could not resign himself to his disfigured condition. It was intolerable, he would cry, that he should now be an object of horror to women—women who had worshipped him almost as a god!"

"Chut—chut! Eh—well! One presumes he meant a certain type of women," observed Monseigneur.

"Possibly so, Monseigneur." The simplicity of the fair face in the narrow guimpe was touching. "For when we assured him that we did not regard him with horror he would say to us: 'That makes nothing! I speak of women. You are only nuns.'"

"But nuns are women," objected Monseigneur.

"Monseigneur, he said not. When his condition seemed to him most miserable he found relief in saying things—abusive—outrageous—about nuns. We didn't mind. We pitied him—poor Number Twenty! But the French and English officers in the same ward resented this. They entreated us to remove him to a separate room. This we did, and at his request the Bavarian was placed in the same apartment—he has been an officer's servant—and is active and useful, even though he has lost a leg. Thus things went better. Poor Twenty seemed more contented. He even looked forward to leaving the Hospital!"

"And then? A change?—a relapse?" suggested Monseigneur.

"A change. He became more gloomy—more violent

after a letter arrived for him from England at the *Jour des morts*. Since two days comes another letter. We heard him raving of perfidy, the folly of his agents—the injustice of his Emperor—the revenge upon the Englishwoman that he would never have now! . . . Then all was quiet. Towards morning the Bavarian came out of the room and called an orderly. The Herr Hauptmann was sleeping, he said, in such a queer way. . . . From that unnatural stupor he never awakened. All his letters and papers were torn up and scattered in fragments. There was a little cardboard box on the night-table and a pencil *billet* for me. I am to send a ring he always wore to the address of a noble young lady at Berlin. She was his *fiancée*, I believe, Monseigneur. He thanks me for the little I have been able to do for him!—he begs the Sisters to pardon his rudeness. . . . He wishes no name upon his grave—but to be forgotten. . . . Poor broken body—poor rebellious heart—poor stubborn, desperate soul!"

"You think, then, that—he killed himself?" asked Monseigneur with directness.

"I dare not think!" She was searching in her table drawer with tears dropping on her hands. "I can only pray that the autopsy of the surgeon will not reveal that the death was not natural. Look, Monseigneur!—this is his ring. A big black-and-white pearl. And under the pearl, which lifts up—is a little box for something. . . . A relic perhaps—or a portrait, or a lock of a friend's hair."

"It might serve as a reliquary—at need, my child," said Monseigneur, examining the platinum setting. He gave one swift glance at the unsuspicious Aumonier and another at the innocent nun. He peered again narrowly at the empty hiding-place, to the shallow sides of which a few atoms of glittering grey dust were adhering. He lifted the ring to his nose and sniffed, tapped the little box on his thumb-nail, and touched his tongue to one of the glittering grey specks. Then he hastily spat in his handkerchief,

and thunder-clouds sat on the furrowed forehead over the great hooked beak.

"Listen!"

The nun started and grew paler still. She hurried to the glazed doors opening on the garden and threw them wide apart. As the chill outer air rushed in, sporting with the scant white locks of M. l'Aumonier, fluttering the purple lappets at the throat of Monseigneur, and tugging as with invisible hands at the Sister's thin black veil, approaching footsteps crunched over the sloppy gravel of the cloister walk.

The small stout figure of the Sister-Keeper of the mortuary headed the small, solemn procession. She held up her habit out of the slush, and carried as well as a mammoth iron doorkey, a small bunch of spring flowers.

A stretcher-squad of the French Red Cross followed the Sister of the mortuary. In life the man they bore must have been a magnificent specimen of humanity. In death the length of his rigid form appeared phenomenal. The black velvet pall, over which had been draped the black-red-white German War Ensign, was far too short to cover the stiff blanket-swathed feet. That they projected beyond the stretcher-end with an effect of arrogance and obstinacy, was the thought that occurred to one of the three people gathered in a little group upon the threshold of the cloister-doors.

"Monseigneur. . . . My Father! . . ." Sister Catherine was speaking in suppressed but eager accents. "It is Number Twenty. They are taking him to the mortuary. The Sister-Keeper promised to carry flowers as a sign that all was well. You understand, do you not? The surgeons have decided—thanks be to God!—that the poor man did not poison himself!"

She dropped to her knees and began to say a decade of her Rosary, the wooden beads running between her fingers

like brown water as she prayed. The priests made the Sign of the Cross silently as the body was borne past. When the last feather of the Black Eagle had vanished, and the crunching of footsteps on sloppy gravel had thinned away in distance, the nun rose.

"You feel happier now, my sister, do you not?" Monseigneur asked kindly.

"Much happier, Monseigneur," she said, "for now I may pray for him!"

Monseigneur, who had retained the ring, shut the hiding-place with a decided click, snapped into its slot the end of the bar that held the magpie pearl in place, and said as he restored the bauble to the nun:

"Who knows but that some ray of Divine Grace may yet shine upon that darkened soul! Do as the owner begged of you, and pray for him by all means!"

"That I will!" she said fervently. "And you also, will you not pray for him? the poor, proud Pagan who believed no resurrection possible—unless one were to exist again as a vapour or a tree. Alas! I fear I have sinned much in yielding to the feeling he inspired in me!"

She added, meeting the keen glance of Monseigneur's vivid eyes:

"The feeling of repugnance. Of horror, Monseigneur! Here comes the Bavarian to finish the inscription. Well, my good Kühler, you have got some more céruse?"

The glass-doors had been darkened by the shape of a one-legged man on crutches, a black-haired, swarthy fellow dressed in the maroon flannel uniform distinctive of the Hospital. A little pot with a brush in it dangled from one of his big fingers. He glanced up under his heavy brows, with a muttered word as he passed the Sister, and returned the greeting of Monseigneur with a clumsy attempt at a salute.

"You are better? You are getting on?" said Monseigneur to him in German.

"Better, *mein Vater*, and getting on."

"That is well! And you have only a little bit to do, and then your work is done?"

"Done, *mein Vater!*" echoed the one-legged man.

He went to the head-board where it was near the door leading to the chapel, leaned his crutches against the wall, and began cautiously and painfully to let himself down. Monseigneur and the Aumonier hurried to his assistance, saw him safely squatted upon his folded sack, took leave of the Sister, who knelt to receive the blessing of the hand that wore the amethyst ring,—and vanished through the farther door at the urgent summons of a bell.

The Sister turned again to her big ledger. A list of articles appertaining to the deceased would have to be checked and verified. Two pairs of binoculars—surely the one bearing the name and address of an officer in a British Guards regiment ought to be sent to the Allies' Headquarters at St. O—. Two purses, one full of English sovereigns, a stout roll of French bank-notes in a pigskin case, and so forth. When next she looked round, the Bavarian was wiping his brushes. The finished inscription now stood:

"HIER RUHT IM GOTT
EIN DEUTSCHER FLIEGENDE OFFIZIER
*T. v. H.*
30 YAHRE ALT."

"You are sorry for him, are you not, my good Kühler?" the nun asked mildly as the Bavarian scrambled to his solitary foot, and stood supporting himself against the wall.

"Sorry, my Sister?" He spoke in thick Teutonic French, and looked at her under his lowering black brows as he reached his crutches out of the corner and tucked them under his arms. "Why should I be sorry? He's dead—and so an end of him. *Total kaput* for another officer!" He saluted the Sister and stumped out.

## CHAPTER LXXII

### LOVE THAT HAS WINGS

UNDER a blue sky—the forget-me-not blue of April—tiny blizzards—mere dust of snow—alternated with slashes of sleet. The road running east from Pophereele was villainous; bad *pavé* in the centre, and on either side morasses of mud from which rose at irregular intervals, scraggy poplars hacked by shell-fire and barked by the impact of innumerable iron-shod wheels.

An almost continuous line of transports bumped over the abominable *pavé*. Staff cars with British Brass Hats and red French *kepis* gold-braided, motor-guns and caissons, motor-lorries, motor-ambulances, motor-cyclists, pedestrians—chiefly Belgian peasants in tall peaked caps and long blue blouses, caked to the knees in sticky mire. Odd detachments of French Artillery, a squadron of Chasseurs in the new uniform of sallow blue—a half-battalion of magnificent, singing Canadians, loaded on the dark green motor-buses that used to run from Holloway to Westminster Bridge.

Where French police were posted at cross-roads and a working-party of British Engineers were mending the highway—filling up shell-pits, and the cunningly-concealed emplacements where a battery of French 75's had been in action a few months before, and the shrapnel-riddled houses of a small village yet harboured a few wizened Flemish peasants, was the point whence you first caught sight of the towers of the ancient capital of Western Flanders, rising above a bank of grey mist, sucked from the thawing earth by the warmth of the April sun.

An historic city of gabled houses, a city on a river long

lost and vaulted over—a city as famous through its industries of cloth-weaving, and the exquisite manufacture of cobwebby lace of Valenciennes, as precious to students of Art and Literature by reason of its stirring history, and the wonders it enshrined. A matchless city, the glory of Flandre Occident, with its Cloth Hall of the marvellous Early Gothic façades, its Renaissance *Nieuwerk* and ancient *Stedehuus*, its glorious cathedral on the north opposite the Halles, with the unfinished tower by Marten Untenhove, and the triumphal arch in the West porch by Urban Taillebert.

Since October, 1914, when a British Brigade with two battalions of another B.B., had successfully withstood the desperate attacks of the flower of the Prussian Imperial Guard, the beautiful old city had suffered bombardment, furious, purposeful, desultory, or intermittent, from the enemy's 11.2-in. long range Krupps. That First Battle—fought upon a line extending from a few miles north-east of the city—had been succeeded after the partial lull of winter, by a second, a stubborn and sanguinary renewal of the struggle, rendered hideous by the use of the Boche's trump-card, flaming oil-jets and asphyxiating gas.

Now the pride of Flandre Occident stood as it stands to-day, like the heart of a martyr calcined but unconsumed in the cold ashes of the pyre. Its sad and stately dignity was marvellously beautiful, under the blue April sky, with its lashes of wintry sleet. Its gardens were dressed in green spring livery, the grass was peeping between the cobble-stones, the scorched and broken chestnut-trees that had shaded the promenades on the site of its ancient ramparts were thrusting out their pinky-brown finger-like buds. And above the shell-pitted waste of uncut brass now representing the Plaine d'Amour,—where the reviews used to take place and the Kermesses, and athletic Club competitions—where the aërodrome is cut by the line of the canal that receives the waters of the subterranean river—a lark

was singing joyfully as it climbed its airy spiral, and a blind man was standing by the twisted ruins of a British aëroplane drinking in the music that rained from the sky.

In the battered Rue d'Elverdinghe, behind a block of the ruined prison, the car that had brought Sherbrand waited. A grey car with the Red Cross and a miniature replica of Old Glory on the bonnet. The Belgian chauffeur smoked cigarettes and read the *Independence Belge* industriously; the American V.A.D. orderly smoked also, surveying the wreckage at the end of the wide thoroughfare, between whose gaunt and roofless walls was revealed a vista of the Grand Place,—where the west façade of the Cathedral reared, a calcined skeleton above the ruined Halles,—and the Belfry whose massiveness defied the genii of destruction for a few weeks to come. Yet he kept his eye on his charge, solicitously. No creature is so utterly unaided by the senses, so pathetically defenceless as a recently blind man.

Drives were part of the treatment prescribed for Sherbrand by the American surgeon of the Hospital at Pophereele. The chauffeur and the attendant were instructed to humour him, and his humour craved solitude and the sense of space. This excursion to the plain lying north-west of the stricken city where Death and Ruin were Burgomaster and Bishop was not the first by several. The few remaining inhabitants —the pale women who made lace in the shelter of broken doorways, the feeble old folks from the almshouses, who peered from their cellar-refuges at the crunch and grind of armoured wheels upon the bricks and timbers heaped upon the littered thoroughfares—dully wondered at these visits of the blind Englishman.

They had seen many strange things of late, the red-eyed, meagre, ague-bitten old people, since that day in early October when fifteen thousand Kaisermen, chanting the German War Song, had defiled for six mortal hours through the streets of their ancient town.

"There are a great many of you gentlemen," some of the old folks had ventured to say.

"That may be so," they had been told, "but we have millions waiting to follow. We are sure to win; the French are cowards, and the English stupid fools. As for you—you are now all Belgo-Germans, our Kaiser has said so! When we leave here we are going to Calais, Paris next, and then London—it's nothing at all to get to London in our magnificent Zeppelins!"

Then suddenly the Germans had gone away—and with them trains of waggons crammed with booty. A week later, amidst the vivas of the people, twenty-one thousand British had poured into the town. They had rolled down the streets like a tawny river singing lustily:

"Here we are—here we are—here we are again!
Hallo! Hallo! Hallo! HALLO!"

And the crowd had been quick to catch up the chorus, responding:

*"Eeeweea—eeweea—eeweea—eggain!*
*Allo! Allo! Allo! ALLO!"*

And the British Headquarters had established itself in its spider-web of Intelligence at the house of the Burgomaster, and the very next day a Boche aviator had tried to drop a bomb on it, and had been winged by a clever shot from an anti-aircraft gun, and brought crashing down on the Plaine d'Amour. And there had been rejoicings on the part of the young people who were thoughtless. But the wise old folks had known quite well that many more Taubes would come.

What an autumn it had been, dear Lord! thought the trembling old people. The first Sunday in August, with its decorations, processions, hymns, and litanies, all in honour of Our Lady of Thuyn, had been turned into a demonstration of penitents. The Kermesse had been prohibited with

the other festivities. No use baking honey-cakes and marzipan. Nobody would have bought them. The Yprais were too busy listening to the distant firing of terribly great guns. All the window-panes rattled and shivered, and the earth vibrated without ceasing. Each morning brought dreadful news, contradicted every afternoon, and confirmed at night. Towns bombarded, townsmen shot, hung, or burned, children and women—even nuns—violated and murdered. Villages wiped out—these were the stories that found their way into the deafest ears. Crowds of refugees evacuated from these towns and villages presently began to throng in. Soon the streets were full from wall to wall. Spies moved everywhere, and no lights dared be shown at night-time. Bread grew scarce, the dreadful sound of the guns drew nearer. Wounded, Allies and Germans also, were brought in, in thousands, by the ambulance-cars. The hospitals and hotels and convents were full—all the schools—and many of the private houses. Terrible rumours gained ground of a great battle about to be fought in the neighbourhood of the town.

Peering from garret-windows by day or night, one could see great banks of black smoke towering on the north, east, and west horizons, pierced by broad licking tongues of cherry-coloured flame. Taubes and Allied aircraft fought battles in the heavens. Bombs were dropped upon public buildings. Death had begun to be common in the streets when the first Krupp shells fell and exploded in the moat behind the Abbey Church of St. Jacques. Ten minutes later—upon the doomed city fell the direst fury of the German hate.

It had been as though hell had opened, as under that hail of iron and fire the troops and transports of the Allies, and the long processions of townspeople afoot and in carts and carriages had rolled out of the town. Even the dogs had left, following their owners. Like the cats—who clung to their familiar surroundings, and had to be removed by

force, if they were to be taken—the old folks resisted the sturdy hands that tugged at them. "Leave us! . . ." they quavered. "We are so old! . . . We can never bear the journey! . . . We should only die upon the roads if we were to go!"

Many did go, and many died, and of those who stayed behind them, Steel, Iron, and Fire claimed a heavy toll. But in the Northern quarter, some yet dwelt in cellar-basements, feeding on mouldy flour, and frozen potatoes. Sleeping on sacks of straw, covered with rugs or blankets, warming their lean, shivery bodies at braziers, choking behind masks taken from slain men through deadly gas-attacks,—creeping up between bombardments for a breath of purer air. Venturing forth to kneel upon the littered pavements of roofless churches, and pray to Our Lord before His vacant tabernacles and shattered Crucifixes—for an end to the dreadful War.

And no answer came, it seemed, for all their praying. They had grown used to the dampness underground. Their eyes were now accustomed to the gloom, as their ears to the stunning crashes of the bombardments—and the perpetual whirr and buzz and whine of the aircraft in the sky. So natural had become to them the abomination of desolation that they actually resented the occasional visits of the Red Cross car from Pophereele.

"Behold him again," they grumbled, "the tall, blind Englishman. What does he seek here? Hardly to view our ruins that he has no eyes to see! And now in another big grey car arrive a French priest and a woman, asking, wherever they meet a soul to ask, if the blind Englishman is here? The priest is a Monseigneur—Old Ottilie swears to the ring and the purple collar. The woman is English, it appears. Perhaps she is the blind man's wife?"

The car moved on where the roadway was not broken by trenches, crawling painfully over litter and wreck. In the shadow of the ruined prison, while yet the sun was high,

they halted. Their chauffeur nodded to his Belgian compatriot, the Red Cross orderly, interrogated by Monseigneur, pointed to the tall brown figure standing on the grass beside the twisted wreckage of a British aëroplane.

"I will wait here for you, Mademoiselle," said Monseigneur, getting out and assisting his fellow-traveller. She was very tall and of supple figure, and wore a long blue coat with the Red Cross shield-badge, and a felt hat banded with the V.A.D. ribbon, pulled down over luxuriant masses of hair—hair that had been cloudy-black as storm-wrack and had been bleached to the hue of wintry beech-leaves, and now had darkened to the brown of peat-earth, deepening in colour every day.

She gave Monseigneur her hand, thanking him, and suddenly he thought her beautiful, although the tall young woman had not previously appealed to the sense of beauty in Monseigneur. Her long eyes under their widely arching brows were stars, her mouth was smiling. When she moved away over the snow-patched grass, she seemed to tread on air. . . .

Throughout the drive Patrine had been torn with horrible misgivings. "What shall I say or do," she had wondered. "How shall I bear it if the look upon his face should tell me, when Alan first hears my voice—that I was wrong to come?" But the chilly fit had passed with the first glimpse of Sherbrand. The rich, warm flood rising in her veins had swept her doubts away.

Here on this shell-pitted expanse of turf you felt the War-pulse beating. French 75's were putting over a furious barrage from the south. North of the City of the Salient the British guns were slogging, and through the chain-fire of the enemy's 77 mm.'s, his 11.2-in. howitzers bellowed at short intervals, and sent in 600-pound shells.

The smoke of a train rose north-west in the direction of Thourout Junction. That the train was a German train,

carrying troops and guns and munitions for War purposes, did not at once occur to Patrine. All was well. Not a doubt remained. She was near her Flying Man again after months of separation. Here at last was food for her hungry eyes and drink for her thirsting soul.

"He has grown thin, poor dear!" she thought, seeing how the war-stained khaki hung in folds on his tall figure. The broad shoulders stooped. The chest had sunken, and he leaned upon a heavy walking-stick. The beloved face was turned away, the line of the cheek was careworn. She choked upon a sob and stopped short, fighting her emotion down.

The song of the soaring lark broke off. The bird dived to earth and hid itself amongst the frosty grasses as the snoring whirr of aircraft came out of the distance high in the sky to the west. Now the shape of a big biplane gleamed pinky-white as a seagull, beating up against the thrust of the snow-tanged easterly breeze.

Nearer and nearer flew the 'plane. Now one could see it distinctly. A French machine by its blue-white-red rings, and a Caudron by its great square tail. A silver-grey monoplane scurried in its wake, a Weiss by the backward curve of its wing-tips. The whirr of its tractor and the blatter of its machine-gun wakened the echoes sleeping among the leprous white ruins of the city. The Caudron wheeled and circled beautifully, and the trac-trac of its mitraille answered the machine-gun, and spent bullets began to patter on the Plaine far below.

Suddenly the Frenchman banked and began to climb. The Weiss, its aluminium sheathing glittering in the sunshine, climbed too, so rapidly that the enemy's purpose was foiled. Then, at a great height they circled round each other, and the crack and flare of explosive revolver-bullets began to mingle with the blatter and trac-trac, and little blobs of something that blazed and sputtered wickedly began to drop with the bullets that tumbled out of the skies.

It was the prettiest sight. It suggested the amorous dallying of two big butterflies, the squabble of a pair of hawking swallows, and yet the issues were Life and Death. Suddenly the Weiss took to flight. A second Caudron had showed upon the distance and the Kaiser's flier was not taking any more on. Waiting for his countryman to come abreast, the Frenchman hovered like a kite-hawk. And at the familiar buzz of the horizontal screws a visible thrill went through Sherbrand. He took off the smoked glasses that he wore, and turned his blind eyes upwards towards the sound, and on his haggard face was stamped the anguish of his despair.

"My poor boy!" nearly broke from Patrine, and hot tears scalded her eyelids. He started, though she had uttered no word, and brought down those unseeing eyes. His nostrils expanded as he inhaled the air. His thick fair brows contracted. The first Caudron, exchanging signals with the second, had ceased hovering and floated onwards, but Sherbrand's thoughts had been brought down out of his sky.

"What is it? . . . Why?" said the intent and frowning look. He snuffed the air again and pondered still, and suddenly Patrine comprehended. Some waft of perfume from her hair or clothes had reached the sense made keener by his blindness, evoked some once-loved image, roused some memory of her.

She crouched low, and looked up at the lean, lined visage yearningly. Dear heart! how changed he was to-day from her young Mercury of the Milles Plaisirs. And yet this altered face of his, marred by the broad, new-healed scar that traversed the left cheek and temple, and the cloudy look of suffering in the prominent grey-blue eyes, was dearer than ever to Patrine.

How bravely the ribbon of the Croix de Guerre and the purple, green, and silver of the Belgian Order showed against the war-stained khaki. What woman living would

not glory in such a lover, welcome the sacred charge, rejoice to be his guide and minister! . . . "Oh, my blind eagle, to sit mateless in the darkness shall not be your fate, God being good to me!" Some words like these were on the lips of Patrine.

But the words were unspoken. He was turning those cloudy, troubled eyes towards his unseen sky again as though trying to project the vision of his soul through the depths of aërial distance. Then he desisted as though wearied by the effort. His stern face softened to dreamy tenderness. His lips moved. Very quietly, but with infinite wistfulness, he uttered her own name:

"Patrine! Patrine!"

He was thinking of her—he was dreaming of her—he was still her lover. She knew a joyful shock, a checking of the pulses. . . . Then her blood whirled on its crimson circle as though arteries and veins were brimmed with wine. Her bosom heaved, her eyes were misty jewels, and out of the wonderful silence about them came to her the low, sweet soughing of her long-lost Wind of Joy.

She moved to Sherbrand, kissed him full upon the mouth, and called him: "Alan!" And a great cry broke from him —a cry of wonder, triumph, and joy. As his arms swept out to enfold her she knew that she had conquered. She had not been deceived in reading love between the formal lines.

"Life has nothing more to give!" was Patrine's thought as his arms held her. It seemed that Death would be a tiny price to pay for such a wonderful moment as this.

"My love, my love! Did you really think we could live without each other?" she stammered through his eager kisses. "Didn't you know I would have to come and carry you back home by the hair of your head? Did you dare to dream that I or any of the people who love you could get on without you? Your mother, and Aunt Lynette—and Bawne and Uncle Owen—and Sir Roland—who managed

things for me to come to you!—and Margot and her boy . . . for there is a boy—a regular topper—born last November—with eyes just like poor Franky's! And you're to come back and be kind to him and his mother—because you promised Franky you would! So that old ghost of your succession to the Viscounty is laid—and I'm glad of it! Another stone heaved out of the way that leads me back to you!"

She went on, holding him as he held her embraced, pouring herself out in a swift rush of eager utterance:

"Come back and help us readjust values. Everything's changed—everything's altered—since the beginning of the War. We women have found out—even the idlest and the vainest of us—that the things we used to live for really meant nothing! What we have called Society is a box of broken toys. The plays we have laughed or cried at—the books we have read—the music we have gone rabid over—the frocks we have sported—the flirtations we have revelled in—the scandals we have discussed—none of these mean anything, count for anything—weigh anything! Nothing is real but Life—and Love—and Death. Not life like the life we used to know—nor love like the love we talked of. A life of work, and help, and prayer, and hope—and courage—and the kind of love that has wings and doesn't crawl in the mud. Nothing like the Death we used to dodge and blink and dread so, but something nobler. Something that leads through the Gate of the Grave—to God! Don't you see that the War was sent to change us?—don't you see——"

He cried out:

"I shall never see again!" An ugly spasm wrenched his jaw aside. "*They* think I take it pluckily. But every night I dream it over once more—and the sky is rushing back, and the ground is swirling up—and the Bird is toppling, spinning downwards, in a trail of smoke and fire. I can hear my observer screaming, poor, poor fellow! How I

escaped burning I don't know. Then comes the crash!—and the grey void of Nothingness out of which, æons later, I crawl into a blind man's dreadful world. A world that is all sounds and voices and sounds and touches. A world where I must live—and die—in the dark!"

She said in her deep sweet voice, with her velvet cheek pressed against Sherbrand's:

"With me. And suppose you saw me, and could not feel nor hear me?"

She felt him shudder as he answered:

"The thing would be Hell!"

"Well, then, let me try and make the best of it! For both of us, my dear one!" She pressed closer to his breast, magnetising him with her touch, her breath, her presence, summoning all her forces of womanly allurements to charm him from despair. "Couldn't I reconcile my lover to the dark?" she whispered.

"Are you cold, dearest?" he asked. For as the last words left her lips a sharp vibration had passed through her. "You shivered as though you were."

"Perhaps? . . . I hardly know," said Patrine, thrusting away the loathed memory of the Upas. "Perhaps the wind has shifted—or a goose walked over my grave."

She changed her tone and began to tell him how Margot had evicted her Uncle Derek and his Lepidopthingambobs and handed over the caravanserai in Hanover Square to the Red Cross people for a Hospital—and how all the wards were to be covered with vulcanised rubber—not a corner to catch a dust-speck anywhere. And she went on to describe her journey in search of Sherbrand, and her disappointment at finding him absent from the Hospital at Pophereele—and the kindness shown her by the Monseigneur who had escorted her from St. O—, and subsequently insisted on accompanying her here.

"For it's supposed to be risky," she ended, smiling. "He says—to me it seems like spitting in the face of a dead body!

—that the Germans shell the poor place nearly every day."

"It's true. They've pitched High Explosive in once already this morning—and as I mean to marry you to-morrow," said Sherbrand, "we had better be off out of it before they repeat the dose." He added: "There's an English Catholic priest at the Hospital—and I've my Special Licence still tucked away in a pocket!"

She exclaimed in delight:

"Then you never meant to give me up? Own it—you didn't!"

"It was you who took your solid oath you wouldn't marry me."

"Unless you were poor and ill—and wanted a woman to nurse you and look after you"—her voice broke—"and work for you! Oh, Boy!—no, not boy any more! My man of all the men that ever were or will be! Don't refuse me the right my love gives me—of working for you!" she urged.

"Such true love. Such fine love. Pat, you're a glory of a woman. And you shall work—I'll give you lots of work," he promised her. "But—my sweet girl, I'm not poor."

She asked him in her deep sweet voice:

"Do you think you'd be poor to me—if you hadn't a copper halfpenny?" And with his arm about her still, and her heart beating against his hand, as they moved over the grass together, she began to describe their home. Quite a small, unpretending, but comfortable home. The home of two people who adored each other, and wanted nothing better than to go on doing it up to the last day of their lives.

"We'll have children—stacks!" she assured him. "Long-legged boys with beaky, hatchet faces—boys who'll invent and build aëroplanes and fly them too, you bet!"

"And girls," put in Sherbrand, tightening his clasp about the supple womanly body, "great big galumphing girls, like their mother!"

"The sweets!" she sighed. "I can see them now!"

"Ah, that's what I shan't do ever," said Sherbrand. "Don't you think they'll be bored with their blind father, sometimes, Pat?"

"Just let them dare! Let them—that's all!" She winked away the tears crowding to her eyelashes. "Besides you mayn't be always blind—I'll never give up praying! Didn't that American surgeon at the Hospital say that cases of functional blindness from shock—like yours—supposing there is no serious lesion in the brain—have been known to recover sight suddenly and completely? Don't shake your head! Isn't there a chance—a blessed possibility—to cling to, and fight for? Ah! if you were cured, don't you *know* I'd send you back to the Front next day? Don't you, Alan? Yes!—yes! you do!" The bright drops rushed in spate over her underlids, and hopped over the front of her long blue coat, to lose themselves among the frosted grasses as she went hotly on:

"Don't you believe—you must believe—I'd lay down my life—just for the glory of doing that! Perhaps I usedn't to care much about England—before the War. But now I've found out what it means to be a pup of the old bull-mother,—I'd meet Death jumping—rather than fail of doing my bit. What's up?"

Someone had whistled shrilly behind them, and she wheeled, to see Monseigneur and a Red Cross orderly beckoning and signalling, standing on a heap of rubbish on the outskirts of the Plaine. Sherbrand, for whom the call was meant, waved his stick and whistled in answer. The orderly, at a gesture from Monseigneur, got nimbly down from the rubbish-heap and started to cross the intervening stretch of grass.

"Why is he coming?" began Patrine, vexedly.

"To fetch the blind man, I suppose."

"Ah-h!" Her long eyes blazed resentment. "If anyone but yourself had called you that! . . . Send him

back!" she pleaded, jealously. "From henceforward nobody is to fetch you—or carry you either, except Me!"

So Sherbrand laughed in his companioned darkness, waved again, and shouted to the orderly to go back. What he said was lost in the racket accompanying the arrival of a German H.E. shell.

For still at intervals during each day and sometimes at night-time the sad dignity of the deserted City of the Salient was outraged by these monstrous messengers of hate. The thing came from the enemy's position east of the city, and fell with a hideous droning note in the wooded park by the Dixmude Gate.

A shattering crash followed—as though the roof of the world were tumbling in. The green park of budding trees was rent and splintered, cratered and riven as though a Dinosaur had died there of acute rabies, biting and tearing and howking up the earth.

Love is a wonderful wit-quickener in necessity. It taught Patrine Saxham, the woman of limitations, exactly what to do at the moment when the great shell droned down to ground. Irresistible as a mountain torrent, she leaped straight for the blind man before her, hurling him backwards by the sudden impact, over-balancing and bearing him down. Pinning him with the sheer weight of her vigorous young body—covering him as Nature teaches a tigress to cover her menaced cub, whilst their ears were deafened with the appalling detonation, the solid earth heaved and billowed under their prone, locked bodies, and the air surged and winnowed about them as though beaten by the passage of huge invisible wings.

"Is this Death?" she asked herself. "Then—for both!" was her half-conscious prayer. But Death passed by in a blizzard of scorching gases, splinters of rending steel, gravel, and stones, splintered timber and pulverised soil, leaving a huge cloud of reddish-yellow billowing over the Plaine d'Amour. A brown powder that stank of verbena, thickly

coated all visible objects. Hair, skin, and clothes were tinted to uniformity, and a smothering oppression burdened the lungs. Yet as Patrine lay gasping, nerveless, beaten, that fierce new-kindled instinct of protection lived in her, potent, vital with possibilities as the spark in the battery or the germ in the cell.

The Great Test had found her not wanting nor unready. The dross of self had been burned away in the flame of a passion high and pure. The Crown of a noble womanhood was hers in that great moment when her body had made a rampart for the shielding of her love.

Under the heave of her bosom Sherbrand's broad chest panted. He lived—and her heart went up in a rush of passionate thanks to Heaven. She moved from him, quaking in every nerve and fibre, crouched beside him, found her handkerchief, and wiped the pungent dust from his face. It was pale, the mouth and eyes were closed, the nostrils fluttered with quick panting. His head had struck against the ground when her leap had hurled him backwards. He had been stunned, she told herself. He would revive soon.

"Patrine!" he choked out, opening his eyes.

"Pat's here by you, my darling!" She slipped her strong arm under his neck and helped him to sit up:

"You're not hurt?" His lungs pumped hard, and his reddened eyes ran water. He blinked it away and caught her hands, crushing them in his grip. "You're sure you're not?"

"Quite, quite sure! And you're all right, aren't you?"

"As right as rain, except for a bump on the head!" He freed a hand and rubbed it. "When the shell came over—and the ground rose up and hit me. How did it happen?"

"I—hardly know. Oh, Alan! God has been good to us! Hasn't He?"

There was no immediate response. Sherbrand's lean face was working. He rose to his knees and thus remained

an instant, in silence that gave thanks. Then he got lightly on his feet, reached down and lifted Patrine. And thus they stood, the girl clinging to the young man's broad shoulders as he held her, the tears from her own still smarting eyes tracing white channels in the dust that masked her quivering face.

"You and I! . . . My hat!—" she gasped—"what a precious pair of scallawags! You lose nothing in not being able to see, my Flying Man!—just now. Oh! but the station! And the park——"

She stopped in sheer astonishment. For the deadliest fury of the High Explosive had wreaked itself on the bit of municipal woodland. With the electric train-station that had neighboured it, and the *abattoirs* in its vicinity, it had been clean wiped out.

"Come," said Sherbrand, tightening his clasp as he felt her sway against him. He was supporting—he was guiding as they turned their faces south.

Here the Death that had passed by had left more traces of its passage. The rent carcase of a gaunt cow that had grazed upon the Plaine d'Amour, lay in a steaming crimson pool among the frosty grasses; and beyond, some thirty paces from the Rue d'Elverdinghe, where the automobiles waited near the ruins of the prison, Monseigneur in his flowing black cloak knelt over a stained bundle of ragged blue clothing and shattered humanity, and the Belgian and his fellow-chauffeur were bringing a stretcher from the Red Cross car. . . .

"The poor orderly has been wounded . . . No! . . . killed!" flashed through Patrine's mind as Monseigneur glanced towards her, gesturing with a supple hand in a swift expressive way. "I must go over there—I may be wanted," she mentally added, controlling her sick shudder and reached back to take again the hand of her blind man. But a sudden exclamation from Sherbrand brought round her

head, and the strange look stamped upon the face she loved, arrested movement and checked utterance.

"What is it? What has happened?" she forced her stiffened tongue to ask him. "Oh, Alan! tell me! You are not ill——"

"Not ill!" came from the twisted mouth, wrung and convulsed with—was it joy or anguish? He shut his eyes, striving for calmness and coherent speech and wrestling with a fierce emotion that made him sway and totter like a drunken man. "Give me your hand—both your dear hands! Don't mind my shutting my eyes—it'll steady me to tell you! . . . Just now—when you let go of me—something happened—and I—*saw!*"

He choked upon the last word. She faced him, white and wild and desperate, and cried in a voice quite strange to Sherbrand's ears:

"You saw! . . . My God!—do you want to drive me crazy? Do you mean—you can't mean——"

"Does the truth sound so insane?" His voice broke in a sob. He opened the shut, quivering lids through which the tears were streaming, and the grey-blue eyes that looked at her were no longer the dead orbs of one blind. Life and light throbbed in their depths, they glowed with such a radiance as the eyes of the First Lover may have shed on the face of the new-made Eve. What was he saying in shaken tones of mingled awe and rapture:

"I saw what I am seeing now. Trees—and green grass, and blue sky—and your face! Your dear face that stayed with me when the Big Dark blotted out the rest. . . . More loving—more lovely than ever I have dreamed it. Oh! Pat, did ever any man get such a wedding-present?" His tone changed: "My sight for me—and death for that poor chap there! Can it be Carpenter—the American who's been so good to me! . . . And the priest helping to lift him—the old man with the noble face? . . . Not Monseigneur—

our Chaplain at the Hospital! He's beckoning! Come! Let's run!"

So these happy lovers with Death as travelling-companion drove away from the City of the Salient. There was a wedding next morning at the Hospital of Popherecle. And twenty-four hours later, the big black-capitalled broadsheets bellowed from Ludgate Hill up Fleet Street and along the Strand to Charing Cross, and all through the West End:

"ROMANTIC SEQUEL TO FAMOUS AVIATOR'S STORY. SHERBRAND OF THE R.F.C., BLINDED IN AIR-BATTLE, RECOVERS SIGHT THROUGH SHELL-SHOCK. MARRIED YESTERDAY. RETURNS WITH BRIDE. CAPTAINCY AND D.S.O."

A closing picture of a young couple sitting very close together on a rustic seat in the garden of a cottage on Seasheere Downs, where hyacinths bloom, and clumps of pink-white peonies, and the Birds of War whirr overhead in a June's sky of speedwell-blue.

Patrine Sherbrand says to her husband, as the smoke of British transports and heavily-laden supply-steamers slants against the east horizon, and the knife-sharp bows of shepherding Destroyers cleave the grey-green waters of the North Sea:

"If without dishonour to your dear name it lay in my power to keep you with me, do you think I'd have it so? Not I! I'll have you carry on as though I'd never even existed. For me—the work that lies at hand. When that's done—dreams of you. If you were killed you'd live for me—my man I gave for England! Our England that they'll never beat—not even if they win!"

"Thanks, my sweet wife! Then when I say—our honeymoon is over——?"

"Ah, well! . . . How soon? . . . "

He told her, looking in her eyes, that did not flinch beneath his:

"In four days! The Medical Board finds me quite fit—and there's a Flying billet waiting. Our Western Front. . . ."

She said, as her heart beat on his and their mouths met in a kiss:

"Then—four more days of love with me, and fly, my Bird of War!"

The Chief Scout had said to Sherbrand in those days of July, 1914: "The Saxham breed's a stark breed—hard as granite, supple as incandescent lava, with a strain of Berserk madness, and a dash of Oriental fatalism. They can hate magnificently and forgive grandly, and love to the very verge of Death."

Sherbrand had found it so. He thanked God that this heart that he had won would never change nor fail him. He knew that he could call his own the love that reaches living hands to Love beyond the grave.

THE END

# The Secret of the Marne

## How Sergeant Fritsch Saved France

By

**Marcel Berger**

Author of "Ordeal by Fire"

and

**Maude Berger**

*12°. $1.50 net. By mail, $1.65*

In a novel rivalling the most exciting detective story, but written with amazing power, the authors build their story around that glorious Marne week, when von Kluck and his cohorts turned to the southeast instead of rushing on Paris. Why did he make this initial mistake that resulted in the Victory of the Marne! There was a young French sergeant who knew, a witty, daringly brave young man, a magnificent linguist, and expert tactician,—and his ladylove, the beautiful Marie-Anne, daughter of the stern old Marquis de Serazereux, knew too.

Marcel Berger studied closely as soldier, and later as visitor, the several regions described, and the novel is as accurate in historical detail as it is astounding in invention.

---

**G. P. Putnam's Sons**

New York London

# Ordeal by Fire

By

## Marcel Berger

A Sergeant in the French Army

*12°. 540 pages. $1.50. By mail, $1.65*

## The French "Mr. Britling"

Everyone who has read "Mr. Britling Sees It Through" will want to read "Ordeal by Fire."

An inspiring portrayal of the spirit of the French people and of Fighting France.

---

G. P. Putnam's Sons

New York London

# GREATHEART

## By Ethel M. Dell

Author of "The Way of an Eagle," "The Rocks of Valpré," "The Keeper of the Door," "Bars of Iron," "The Hundredth Chance," etc.

*12°. Color Frontispiece. $1.50 net. By mail, $1.65*

SURELY Miss Dell has never written anything more deserving of the title "best seller" than this absorbing story, which takes an elemental grip on the reader to an amazing degree.

The flirtation of a young girl, released for a brief time from the harsh restraint of an unlovely home, develops until it assumes overmastering proportions, and she is barely saved from herself by the steadfast loyalty, unspoken love, and great moral courage of the physically weak brother of her handsome, impulsive, and philandering lover. The scene is largely laid in Switzerland, and the ravishing beauty of that lovely land is painted with admirable skill.

**G. P. Putnam's Sons**

**New York** **London**

# The Smiting of the Rock

**A Tale of Oregon**

**By Palmer Bend**

*12°. Frontis. by Belmore Browne*
*$1.50 net. By mail, $1.65*

CLEAR, clean, well-written is this story of the adventures brought to David Kent by "a plain-faced Bishop, a superlatively pretty girl, and a quixotic resolution"—a book to *refresh* and *appeal.*

It is sunny with the spirit of the western country, the magnificent mountains, and the whole-hearted pioneers of today. It is a tale of failure and success, of love and youth and dramatic contrast, lit with humor and warm with the breath of life and actuality.

**G. P. Putnam's Sons**

**New York** **London**